

Samuel Asa Small

The Merchant of Venice



Shepherd

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**SHAKSPEREAN
CHARACTER INTERPRETATION:
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE**

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To
My Sister

Mary Louise Small, M.D.

PREFACE.

The purpose of this work is, first, to survey carefully the criticism on the characters in *The Merchant of Venice*, and, secondly, to give an original interpretation according to the sixteenth century mind. In view of the increasing bulk of Shakspearean literature, it is quite impossible to publish in one volume studies on all the plays without condensing the material to mere "outline" form. By taking a single play, enough detailed information has been recorded to show the trend of character interpretation. The chronological order has been followed to reveal the changing tendencies with regard to the aesthetic appreciation of the play. *The Merchant of Venice* has been chosen because it has proved to be one of the most enduring of Shakspeare's plays as a popular stage production, and because its critical history is typical of all the plays. Chapter five contains the author's interpretation of characterization after the manner of the latest school of Shakspearean study.

It is a pleasure to record my obligations to the editor of this series, Professor James W. Bright, of the Johns Hopkins University, who introduced me to Shakspearean criticism and was kind enough to accept this volume for publication in his series; as also to Professor Kemp Malone, who made some suggestions on the interpretation given in chapter five.

S. A. S.

Baltimore,

September, 1926.

IN MEMORIAM

Am 29. November 1926 starb James Wilson Bright, der Herausgeber der Ergänzungsreihe der *Hesperia*, im Alter von 74 Jahren (geb. 2. Okt. 1852). Sein Hinschied kam nicht unerwartet, denn schon etwa zwei Jahre früher hatte für ihn eine Zeit körperlicher Gebrechen und Leiden begonnen, die ihn bald nötigten, seinen Berufspflichten zu entsagen, und die weiterhin mehr und mehr eine Wendung zum Schlimmeren nahmen.

Nach vierzigjähriger Lehrtätigkeit war er im Jahre 1925 in den Ruhestand getreten. Er hatte seine Aufgabe von jeher in möglichst enger Verbindung von Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft gesehen. Maßgebend für die Richtung seiner Studien war, daß er seine Vorbildung am Lafayette College (Easton, Pa.) unter Francis A. March erhalten, dann von 1879 bis 1882 als Graduate Student und Fellow an der Johns Hopkins University unter Albert Cook studiert und schließlich drei Semester in Deutschland zugebracht hatte, wo namentlich Sievers, Paul und Ten Brink Einfluß auf seine Studien gewannen. Den philosophischen Doktorgrad hatte er sich an der Johns Hopkins University im Jahre 1882 erworben.

Mit dem Jahre 1885 setzte seine Lehrtätigkeit auf dem Gebiete der englischen Philologie an der Johns Hopkins University ein. Den Zwecken des Unterrichts diente sein *Anglo-Saxon Reader, and Outlines of Anglo-Saxon Grammar* (New York 1891; 4. Aufl. 1917). In diesen Zusammenhang gehört auch seine kritische Handausgabe der westsächsischen Evangelien-Übersetzung (in 4 Bändchen, Boston 1904-06), für die er die Hss. von neuem verglich, sowie die in Gemeinschaft mit R. L. Ramsay bearbeitete westsächsische Übersetzung des Psalters (ebd. 1907).

Für die vielseitige Anregung die von seinen Vorlesungen und Seminarübungen ausging, zeugen die Arbeiten seiner zahlreichen Schüler, von denen es genügen mag, hier beispielsweise Morgan Callaway Jr., James D. Bruce, Robert Lee Ramsay, sowie Samuel C. Chew, Marie L. Lilly, Edna Robinson, und die Gebrüder Small (George W. und Samuel A.) zu erwähnen. Er gehörte zu den anfänglichen Mitgliedern und eifrigen Förderern der *Modern Language Association of America*. In Zusammenhang damit steht seine langjährige erfolgreiche Tätigkeit als Mitarbeiter und Leiter der *Modern Language Notes*.

Der Herausgeber der *Hesperia* verliert an ihm nicht nur einen langjährigen Kollegen und Mitarbeiter, sondern auch einen seiner nächsten persönlichen Freunde.

D. C.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Shaksperean criticism of a serious kind began over two hundred years ago and in that time fluctuations in opinions regarding the aesthetic import of the plays have run an uncertain course. After too long an imprisonment in the seventeenth century, this imp, criticism, like Icarus in the old myths, at first followed after his begetter, Dryden, in a legitimate comparison of romantic and classic ideals: only later in the enthusiasm of his experience to break away from his paternal keeping and rise too near the philosophic sun. His wings have recently broken and we find "Icarus" to-day struggling in the water for a new reasonable footing. And yet, just as we can admire the ambition of an Icarus, so all the lavish romantic appreciation of Shakspere's plays, though erroneous for the most part, has in it a beauty and a wisdom that is too good to be forgotten. However wrong from the point of view of criticism may be the story of Portia's girlhood days or Shylock's plea for justice to the Jew, such literature has thoughts of its own well worth reading.

Freytag explains the power in every spectator's mind of meeting the dramatist half way in his characterization and thus completing in the imagination what the dramatist has only hinted at or left entirely unsaid¹. This helpful activity of the reader or spectator to cooperate with the dramatist has produced most of the aesthetic criticism of the last century. There is nothing said by Freytag about the danger of the spectator's drift away from the dramatist's intention. The historical critics rightly disregard any consideration of the spectator's free interpretation of what takes place, unless it is supported by a knowledge of

¹ *Technique of the Drama*, (Translation, MacEvan), 1895, p. 249.

the social life and dramatic practice of the sixteenth century. If we realize the intense hatred with which the Jews were regarded in England at the time of the Lopez incident in 1594, we should readily expect Shylock to be the despised villain in *The Merchant of Venice* and not the pathetic figure generally portrayed on the modern stage. Or to illustrate the same point in dramatic practice, Hamlet's reference in the third soliloquy to the 'bourn' from which no traveller returns

is burdened with various subjective interpretations because the meaning from Hamlet's point of view is nonsensical since he a moment before spoke to the ghost who did return from the 'bourn'. The historic critic discerns that this is a common Senecan phrase used by Shakspeare to enhance the beauty of the soliloquy and please the knowing ears of the audience.

When Shakspeare himself first read the old stories upon which he built his plays, he must have experienced the same subjective vigor of mind that is explained by Freytag. This new or individual impression of the story derived by Shakspeare is the story-characterization. It was an individual impression in the mind of Shakspeare since he was the spectator, not the dramatist at this time. But the conscious process of the dramatist works along an entirely different line. His problem is dramatic characterization.

In the popular mind, the art of Shakspeare concerns itself only with problems of plot construction, such as the skilful interweaving of two plots; the handling of the elements of contrast; the general progress of the story as having a beginning, climax, and denouement; etc. Rules growing out of such a study can be thrown into a more or less accurate recipe for any of Shakspeare's plays. It has only been recently that the study of Shakspeare's art, in the sense of a practical stage necessity, has been extended to include the finer questions of character drawing.

The secret of Shakspeare's genius in characterization is involved in the delicate tact of his art. The great variety of his gifts enabled him to manipulate with the greatest skill the humors, idiosyncrasies, and dramatic conventions prevalent in his

day. His genius involved, further, the needs of his plot and the demand of the audience. If we thus associate his genius with dramatic functions of every sort, there is no place for characterization except as a part of sixteenth century dramaturgy. If one studies the characters as well-rounded living figures, one must get away from the play and depend on subjective interpretation. On the other hand, to understand Shakspeare's purpose in the matter — and that is the aim of the historical realists — it must be laid down as a principle that characterization was partially worked out by Shakspeare in terms of stage effects. Stated in other words, the older school concerned itself with the imaginative invention of the reader or spectator; while the historical school observes those points of characterization shown directly in artistic methods. Moreover, Shakspeare's genius was conservative to a degree that makes him less individual in his purpose than Marlowe and other contemporaries. The outstanding example to prove this is the use of the clown, which was despised by most of the Elizabethans as an archaism and an indication of popular compromise, but, for these very reasons, retained and developed by Shakspeare to a high technical art.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS OF AESTHETIC APPRECIATION

The 17th
Century

From Shakspeare's death in 1616 until the days of Dryden interest in Shakspeare's plays was dull. One reason for this is that the Elizabethan spirit was gradually passing away. Ingleby tells us that "the old freshness, delicacy, richness, and wanton joyousness of English verse had all but gone; poetry became, on the whole, more measured, more learned and more sententious, and, at the same time, more satirical and vicious. Imagination was less power and less rich: in a more learned, but less wise age, geographical and classical errors in drama were well-nigh impossible, and anachronism practically disappeared; but Ariel was dead²". Another reason is also found in the social status of the theatre. On the stage was reflected an unrefinement which stirred the hostility of the Puritans and resulted in the closing of the theatres after the revolution. But amid this dull period of neglect of Shakspeare, there are many casual references mostly in poetical form, which show that appreciation of the dramatist's genius was felt by a few people³. Among these about twenty-five are instances of imitation from *The Merchant of Venice*. These indicate admiration for passages that are beautiful or striking in one way or another⁴, but they have very little critical value.

The latter part of the seventeenth century admired Shakspeare as a writer of comedy. This is most notably seen from the

² John Munro, *The Shakspeare Allusion-Book* (revised), Vol. I, p.xlvi.

³ John Taylor said (1620) that „Shakespeare did in art excell“; Thomas Heywood spoke of the „mellifluous Shakespeare“; Sir John Suckling in 1646, comparing him with Jonson said: „And gentle Shakespear's eas'er strain.“ (see others in the Allusion-Book, vol. I, pp. 307 ff.)

⁴ One example: One verse in Thomas Otway's *Windsor Castle*, 1685, reads „Mercy's indeed the attribute of Heaven“, which reminds us of Portia's speech on mercy.

high regard in which the character of Falstaff was held. More allusions refer to him than to any other character in Shakspeare. Allusions to Shakspeare as a portrayer of comic characters are enough to show us that the dramatist's fame, if he had any, was greater in this direction than as a writer of tragedies. George Daniel referred to "Comicke Shakspeare" in 1647; Cokaine wrote of "Shakspeare, most rich in humours," in 1653. Wilmot, in 1678, said that Shakspeare hits home with "a jeast in scorn". Temple declared Shakspeare was the first to open this vein of humor upon our stage⁵.

After Jonson and Milton rendered their poetical praise, John Dryden expressed his profound admiration for Shakspeare. In the *Essay* and the *Defense* he uses the most superlative language in expressing his high estimation of the poet and his works. "To begin with Shakspeare, he was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inward and found her there." In *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*, Dryden writes that "Shakspeare had a universal mind, which comprehended all characters and passions". In spite of this great praise, Dryden had much adverse criticism to make about the dramatist's work. His accusation that Shakspeare was not as correct as Jonson, shows that he shared with his contemporaries a strong preference for the classical traditions of the stage. In his *Essay*, he expresses the idea that the contemporary French plays were superior to the Elizabethan. Another writer of this period was Rymer, who was unmercifully abusive in his condemnation of Shakspeare. His book, *A Short View of Tragedy*, published in 1693, rated Shakspeare's writings as barbarous and inartistic, because they did not conform to classical precepts.

⁵ See Munro, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 11.

Dryden's opinions, on the whole, were favorable to Shakspere. He did not allow his classical leanings to bring him to such wreckless and sweeping statements as we find in Rymer's book.

Dryden's only reference to *The Merchant of Venice* is about Shylock. In his preface to his translation of Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica* (1695) he speaks of the propriety of conforming the traits of character to the action of the piece and says: "He who enter'd in the first act, a young man like Pericles, prince of Tyre, must not be in danger in the fifth act, of committing incest with his daughter: nor an usurer, without great probability and causes of repentance, be turn'd into a cutting Moorcraft." This indirect praise of Shakspere's handling of the characters of Pericles and Shylock assumes the most skilful workmanship on his part.

The Stage

But regardless of the restrained opinions of Dryden, Rymer, and numerous other writers of less fame who followed the same standard, we know from the activities of Thomas Betterton that Shakspere on the stage delighted large audiences during this period. Betterton was thought the greatest actor in the world by Samuel Pepys. In his *Diary* under date of May 28, 1663, he remarks: "And so to the duke's house; and there saw "Hamlett" done, giving us fresh reason never to think enough of Betterton." Pepys' enjoyment and appreciation of Shakspere must have been large, as his *Diary* shows that he witnessed many of the principal dramas during the eight years from 1660 to 1668. It is noteworthy, however, that among the plays mentioned by Pepys, *The Merchant of Venice* is missing.

Samuel
Pepys

The stage history of *The Merchant of Venice* up to the Lansdowne version in 1701, is a blank, unless meager references during Shakspere's day can be called stage-history. Besides the mention of *The Merchant of Venice* by Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* (1598) and its record at Stationers' Hall (1598), Henslowe in his diary speaks of a "Venesyan Comedy" having been performed at Newington Butts, Surrey. Details regarding the performance are not known, so that it is questionable if this play is identical with *The Merchant of Venice*. If we are to

believe J. P. Collier, Richard Burbage many times acted the role of Shylock, wearing red hair and a long false nose. Collier's source of information, however, is not known.

Of all the plays of Shakspeare that were commented on in a promiscuous fashion during the seventeenth century, none was more obscure than *The Merchant of Venice*. This is the dulllest period in ~~the~~ our history. There is no trace of anything like character-interpretation. Dryden's use of Shylock to illustrate a principle lacks the warmth of literary appreciation. The reason for this lack of interest is no doubt the popular prejudice against the Jews, which continued from the Elizabethan age. It is very probable that *The Merchant of Venice* never was acted on the stage during the century.

The beginning of the eighteenth century saw a curious turn The 18th
Century in the stage history of many of Shakspeare's comedies. In the belief that they were improving the original plays, many writers, among whom were Gildon, Cibber, Dennis, and Leveridge, revised them to suit the tastes of their time. George Granville, Viscount Lansdowne, mutilated *The Merchant of Venice* and gave it the name, *The Jew of Venice*⁶. It was first produced by Betterton The
Lansdowne
version in 1701, and continued on the stage for forty years.

The Merchant of Venice was so transformed that Shylock is given a low-comedy role. The prologue, written by Bevil Higgons, is a dialogue between the ghosts of Shakspeare and Dryden, in which the theme is hinted at as the punishment of "a stock-jobbing Jew". The coarseness of the Jewish character is enhanced by the insertion in the second act of a banquet scene presenting Antonio, Shylock, and their company. The hostility between the enemies is forgotten for a moment. The guests all drink to the "immortal friendship" between Antonio

⁶ Gildon reworked *Measure for Measure* (1700); Cibber, *Richard III* (1700); Dennis, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1702); Leveridge, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* (1716); Dennis, *Coriolanus* (1721); Charles Johnson, *As You Like It* (1723); Duke of Buckingham, *Julius Caesar*, (1722); Worsdale, *The Taming of the Shrew* (1736); J. Miller, *Much Ado About Nothing* (1737); Cibber, *King John* (1744); etc.

and Bassanio, the former having put aside his wonted sadness. Bassanio then proposes a toast to his lady, Portia. When all have drunk again, Shylock rises and says:

I have a mistress, that outshines 'em all —
 Commanding yours — and yours tho' the whole sex:
 O may her charms increase and multiply;
 My money is my mistress! Here's to
 Interest upon interest.

As the music plays, Antonio is suddenly seized with melancholy again and curiously enough utters a thought which in the original play is spoken by Jessica.

There sits a heaviness upon my heart
 Which wine cannot remove; I know not
 But music ever makes me that.

Bassanio gives the same answer that Lorenzo gives to Jessica (Act V, Sc. i):

The reason is your spiritis are attentive, etc.

In this version, the comic and hated figure of Shylock is thrown somewhat in the background, while Bassanio becomes the leading character. As the leading actor preferred the part of Bassanio, a different aspect was given to the play when acted. Thomas Betterton never played the part of Shylock.

What is the significance for us of the Lansdowne version and the other similar distortions of this period? It cannot be that Shakspeare's reputation was declining for that would assume that his worth was to some extent estimated during the Restoration period. As a matter of fact nothing was so uninspiring to that age than the antiquated productions of Shakspeare. The opinions of Pepys and others show a surprising lack of real sympathy. But the appearance of these strange adaptations at the turn of the new century is a definite step in the rise of public estimation. The low-level of literary taste could accept Shakspeare only in the dress of its own fashion.

The
 Critics

The hold that the classical tradition had on the critics of the Restoration period, principally voiced by Rymer, continued

to be felt through the greater part of the eighteenth century. The great critics upheld the principles of Rymer, though recognizing, as did Dryden, the genius of Shakspeare. The analytical study of Shakspeare's plays, the supremacy of his skill in character drawing and plot construction, the detailed appreciation of his merits, were almost completely neglected until the latter part of the century principally because there existed in the minds of scholars a traditional sanctity of classical models. Nicholas Rowe, the first editor and biographer of Shakspeare, tried to appreciate the poet's work while at the same time adhering firmly to classical doctrines⁷. His refusal to take a definite stand on either side reflects itself in the uncertain and irregular way he took in writing his own play, *Jane Shore*. Subconsciously he felt the tightening grip of the classical rules though he professed Shakspeare as his model. While Rowe conceded to Shakspeare a strength which was derived from nature, we find a powerful French critic exerting an influence for classical methods, that was uncompromising.

Nicholas
Rowe

The activities of Voltaire in trying to popularize the classical doctrines should be regarded as instrumental in delaying a whole-hearted study of Shakspeare's genius. Voltaire would have nothing to do with a genius which he thought was erratic. For a long time after his exile in England beginning in May, 1726, he kept the air stirred with his scathing judgment of the English poet. Lounsbury, who has written the authoritative book on Voltaire's literary influence on England, remarks thus about the French critic: "A man who could in all sincerity assert, as did Voltaire, that in the three unities, all other laws, that is to say, all other beauties of the drama, are comprised, was not likely to be impressed favorably by the persistent disregard of them which Shakespeare had manifested⁸". Voltaire could not understand why the people preferred Shakspeare's plays to the more formal *Cato* of Addison, and for this reason he failed to understand the taste of the English nation.

Voltaire

⁷ See his *Account of Shakespeare*.

⁸ *Shakespeare and Voltaire*, p. 7.

Dennis & Gildon In the same class with Nicolas Rowe, as half-hearted admirers of Shakspeare, are John Dennis and Charles Gildon, both of whom tried to refute Rymer's condemnation of the poet, but who themselves were so much dominated by the classical spirit that they readily found fault with Shakspeare's methods of dramatizing. After stating that "Shakespeare was one of the greatest geniuses that the world ever saw for the tragical stage," and pointing out the high qualities of that genius, Dennis says in *On the Genius and Writings of Shakespear*: "If Shakespeare had these great qualities by nature, what would he not have been, if he had joined to so happy a genius, learning and the poetical art?" He claimed that there is not enough dignity in the rabble seen in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*. With regard to Shakspeare's abuse of poetical justice he says: "But indeed Shakespeare has been wanting in the exact distribution of poetical justice not only in his *Coriolanus*, but in most of his best tragedies, in which the guilty and the innocent perish promiscuously; as Duncan and Banquo in *Macbeth*, as likewise lady Macduff and her children; Desdemona in *Othello*; Cordelia, Kent, and King Lear, in the tragedy that bears his name; Brutus and Portia in *Julius Caesar*; and young Hamlet in the tragedy of *Hamlet*. For tho' it may be said in defence of the last, that Hamlet had a design to kill his uncle who then reigned; yet this is justified by no less than a call from heaven, and raising up one from the dead to urge him to it." Gildon proceeds in his criticism in a manner similar to that of Dennis. He praises him for the gifts of character-drawing and diction with which nature had endowed him. He is shocked at Shakspeare's disregard of the unity of time and place and condemns his custom of mingling tragedy and comedy.

Pope & Johnson As for Pope and Johnson, these critics are of a higher order than the two just mentioned. Both had a very great regard for Shakspeare and were not so outspoken in their fault-finding. Pope thought his faults were due to the age in which he lived. "The audience was generally composed of the meaner sort of people; and therefore the images of life were to be drawn from

those of their own rank: accordingly we find that not our author's only but almost all the old comedies have their scenes among tradesmen and mechanics: and even their historical plays strictly follow the common old stories or vulgar traditions of that kind of people. In tragedy, nothing was so sure to surprise and cause admiration, as the most strange, unexpected, and consequently most unnatural, events and incidents: the most exaggerated thoughts; the most verbose and bombast expression; the most pompous rhymes, and thundering versification⁹." Johnson, writing forty years later, considered the matter of Shakspeare's classical errors in a more scholarly manner. His chief praise is that he is above all others "the poet of nature," and seems to be more impressed with his faults than was Pope. In his *Preface* (1765) he lists Shakspeare's faults in nine paragraphs thus:

1. He sacrifices virtue to convenience.
2. The plots are loosely formed.
3. In many plays the latter part is evidently neglected.
4. He had no regard to distinction of time or place.
5. In his comic scenes, he is seldom very successfull when he engages his character in reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm.
6. In tragedy his performance seems constantly to be worse, as his labor is more.
7. In narration he affects a disproportionate pomp of diction and a wearisome train of circumlocution.
8. His declamations or set speeches are commonly cold and weak.
9. It is incident to him to be now and then entangled with an unwieldy sentiment.

Between Pope and Johnson many critics and editors of lesser fame printed their opinions of Shakspeare. As the century developed, Shakspeare became the subject of much critical theorizing until recognition of his genius crystallized in Johnson's *Preface*. Literary standards gradually changed toward the end of the century.

⁹ See his *Preface*, 1725.

It is quite natural that matters pertaining to Shakspeare's supremacy over classical canons had to be cleared away before any attempt at understanding Shakspeare's art could be made. Aesthetic criticism began in the last quarter of this century and its progress was greatly accelerated by the same romantic outlook on life which affected all the literature of this period. The new romanticism abolished forever the classic traditions of the previous century and ushered in a school of appreciation which placed Shakspeare at times too near to the position of a god. In a later chapter this exaggerated admiration will be shown.

The
Apprecia-
tion of
The
Merchant
of Venice

The Merchant of Venice is not dealt with in the first book to be devoted to Shakspeare's characters: *Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* published by William Richardson in 1774. But earlier in the century some few remarks of an interpretative nature had been made on the characters in our play. Remarkable indeed is Rowe Nicholas Rowe's opinion that Shakspeare meant Shylock to be a tragic figure: "To these I might add that incomparable character of Shylock the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice*; but tho' we have seen that play received and acted as a comedy, and the part of the Jew performed by an excellent comedian, yet I cannot but think it was designed tragically by the author." This was written in 1709, when, as his reference to a comedian playing the part of Shylock would indicate, he probably was thinking of Lansdowne's version. He criticised that part of the play "relating to the caskets, and the extravagant and unusual kind of bond given by Antonio" as "a little too much removed from the rules of probability". On the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio he said it was "very great, generous and tender". The fourth act was to him extremely fine though not very probable. Lastly, he selected as the two best passages in the play, the one in praise of mercy and that on the power of music.

Hanmer

Sir Thomas Hanmer in the preface to his edition of the plays (1744) thought that a great deal of the "low stuff" was introduced into the plays by the players after Shakspeare's death,

and that most of the "witticisms and conceits" were put in the play by Shakspeare to satisfy the vicious tastes of his audience. The following passage spoken by Lorenzo after quibbling with the clown expresses the poet's indignation "at these false pretences to wit then in vogue":

How every fool can play upon a word! I think the best grace of wit will shortly turn into silence, and discourse grow commendable in none but parrots. (IIII, v)

Zachary Grey, writing in 1754¹⁰, commented on a passage Grey which indicated to him an inconsistency in the character of Gratiano:

If I do not put on a sober habit,
Talk with respect, and swear but now and then,
etc. (II, ii)

Grey pointed out that in the first part he professes to be somewhat of a libertine, while in the latter he is precise and puritanical.

Lord Kames in his *Elements of Criticism* (1769)¹¹ exemplified Shakspeare's supreme skill in drawing character by two passages from *The Merchant of Venice*. Kames

Gratiano. Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,
Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
etc. (I, ii)

and the description of Gratiano:

Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, etc. (I, ii)

Richard Farmer, in his Essay on the learning of Shakspeare (1767) called attention to the sympathies and antipathies which Shylock rehearses "as an apology for his cruelty to Antonio". Farmer

Henley was the first to point out that Shylock is the best example to show Shakspeare's genius in suiting expression to character. "Perhaps there is no character through all Shakespeare, drawn with more spirit, and just discrimination, than Shylock's. His language, allusions, and ideas, are everywhere so appropriate Henley

¹⁰ *Notes on Shakespeare*, (I, p. 132).

¹¹ I, p. 337. First edition appeared in 1767.

to a Jew, that Shylock might be exhibited for an exemplar of that peculiar people¹²."

Warburton William Warburton in commenting on the word *bankrupt* and *prodigal* as applied to Antonio gave his own impression of the Merchant. "But why a prodigal? His friend Bassanio indeed had been too liberal; and with this name the Jew honors him when he is going to sup with him:

— I'll go in hate to feed upon

The prodigal Christian —

But Antonio was a plain, reserved parsimonious merchant; be assured, therefore, we should read — a *bankrupt* for a *prodigal*¹³."

Johnson Samuel Johnson made a keen observation when he pointed out an inconsistency in the story at the place where the Prince of Arragon reads the scroll which he found in the silver chest.

Take what wife you will to bed.

Perhaps the poet had forgotten that he who missed Portia was never to marry any woman¹⁴."

Steevens Likewise George Steevens noted an inconsistency in characterization but surpassed Johnson by explaining it on the grounds of dramatic necessity. To explain Shylock's acceptance of the Christian invitation to dinner, he remarks: "In a former scene he declares he will neither eat, drink, nor pray with Christians. Of this circumstance the poet was aware, and meant only to heighten the malignity of the character, by making him depart from his most settled resolve, for the prosecution of his revenge¹⁵."

Mrs. Griffith After having to pick up smattering comments and observations about the characters in the play, it is a pleasure to meet with a work devoted to finding moral lessons in the speeches of the different characters. One year after the publication of William Richardson's work, which unfortunately contains no comment on *The Merchant of Venice*, Mrs. Giffith published her book, *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama* (1775). Her

¹² Edition of Shakspere: note I, iii.

¹³ Note III, i.

¹⁴ Note II, ix.

¹⁵ Note II, v.

purpose is of the simplest sort. She merely selects from the play those passages which teach lessons in practical morality. The sad Antonio is a type of person that is often met with in real life. His friends quite naturally inquire after the cause of his sadness and try to guess what the trouble is. After they have failed to find any cause, they refer it "merely to the peculiarity of his character, or particular complexion of mind". Associated with the merchant we find Gratiano and Bassanio, who exemplify the cheerful type of person whom we often see in real life.

Mrs. Griffith quotes the following passage from the first scene of the play as expressing "a warmth of affection and generous friendship":

Bassanio: To you, Antonio,

I owe the most in money, and in love;
And from your love I have a warranty
To unburden all my plots and purposes,
How to get clear of all the debts I owe.

Antonio: I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it;
And if it stand, as you yourself still do,
Within the eye of honor, be assured,
My purse, my person, my extremest means
Lie all unlocked to your occasions.
etc.

Nerissa's first speech in the second scene of the first act, teaches us the golden mean:

And yet, for

ought I see, they are as sick that surfeit with too much,
as they that starve with nothing; therefore, it is no
mean happiness to be seated in the mean; superfluity comes
sooner by white hairs, but competency lives longer.

Morocco's speech to Portia "is a reflection on the casualties of fortune, which no merit, no industry, no predence can control".

Mrs. Griffith thought that Launcelot's soliloquy in which "conscience" and the "fiend" try to influence him, was filled with good instruction. I quote Mrs. Griffith's entire comment

on this passage because it illustrates how far she sometimes stretches her interpretation: "The soliloquy of Launcelot is a strong picture of the mind of man; whenever it debates within itself upon the right or wrong of a question, in which it is in any way interested; for in such cases, our passions, even without our connivance, are apt to plead their own cause; and we but sophisticate, while we think we reason. In all doubtful matters, where the arguments seem to be equally suspended, 'tis prudent ever to suspect that side of the balance to be the lightest, which we find our affections the most inclined to¹⁶."

Antonio's speech of farewell to Bassanio at the Trial scene has "some philosophic reflections on the advantages of dying before we are encumbered with age and poverty, with a manly spirit of acquiescence in the unavoidable ills of life, joined to the affecting tenderness and generous regards of friendship".

Several of Portia's speeches were also moralized upon. The remark Portia makes at the end of a long speech,

This comes too near the praising of myself;

Therefore, no more of it.

Mrs. Griffith thought, teaches us a lesson in "reserve and modesty". Portia points out, also, the danger of excess of joy when she says after her raptuous speech at Bassanio's successful choice:

How all the other passions fleet to air —

As doubtful thoughts, and rash-embraced despair,

And shuddering fear, and green-eyed jealousy,

O love, be moderate, allay thy ecstasy;

In measure rein thy joy, scant this excess;

I feel too much thy blessing; make it less,

For fear I surfeit.

Portia's mimicing of a bragging youth in act III, sc. iv is but a reflection of the same type of young men one meets with in the camps and coffee houses of to-day. In the following speech:

Sir, you are welcome to our house —

It must appear in other ways than words;

Therefore I scant this breathing courtesy

¹⁶ *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama*, p. 57.

Portia expresses "the true sentiment of affection, which renders possessions needless, where intentions are sincere".

Lastly, the music, and Lorenzo's speech on its power in the last act, could not be left unnoticed by Mrs. Griffith. "There can never be said too much on this charming theme. Men's minds may be sometimes too stern or obstinate to yield to argument, but in melody there is a sort of sentiment, that sinks into the heart, and by awaking the softer passions of the soul, often persuades, where reason also would fail¹⁷."

Before leaving the eighteenth century in which the artistic criticism of Shakspeare began to get into its full stride, we should mention the manner of interpreting Shylock on the stage. After the Lansdowne version had held the stage for over forty years, a reaction took place. The movement to go back to the original play was started by the actor Charles Macklin, who made his fame principally by the portrayal of the character of Shylock at Drury Lane. The famous actor emphasized strongly the revengefulness and arrogance of the Jew, but he is credited with having started the practice of making the audience feel at times a sympathy for the despised race. Though Macklin touched the tragic spirit only slightly, he is the precursor of many nineteenth century interpretations which made the most out of this sentimental appeal.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 64.

CHAPTER III

CHARACTER STUDY OF THE MERCHANT OF VENICE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The task before us on entering the nineteenth century is to collate enough material on the characters in *The Merchant of Venice* to make one understand and appreciate the nature of Shakspearean criticism of that century. Some few writers of the twentieth century have been included because they have carried over certain subjective views of the past. The amount of fruitful work expended on Shakspeare during the last century is enormous. Its trend in great part was not always in true scholarly lines. But the century's work is probably the greatest example in literature of how much utterance of wisdom and beauty can be provoked by a great genius. Extreme admiration for Shakspeare was the cause for the pouring out of a vast amount of critical and philosophical thought, and this literature merits its own share of appreciation. Of course in the following pages particular attention has been given to extreme views with the purpose of contrasting them later with the new historical methods.

Schlegel Augustus Schlegel was aware that in his time a new method of criticism was being born and successfully defined the new attitude toward Shakspeare's dramas. Coleridge was almost entirely in agreement with the German romanticist's views; both regarded Shakspeare as a consummate artist and dissociated his plays from the classical type by calling them "romantic dramas". Schlegel's work appeared in 1808 and was translated into English in 1815 by John Black under the title: *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*. It was very favorably received in England and inspired the works of Hazlitt and other romanticists in that country. His comments on the characters are

not as full as those of later critics but his observations were new and what he has said has been the basis of all later discussions on the characters. His observations on the artistic handling of the characters in *The Merchant of Venice* may be thus tabulated:

1. About Shylock's motives against Antonio Schlegel says: "The desire to avenge the wrongs and indignities heaped upon his nation is after avarice, his strongest spring of action. His hate is naturally directed chiefly against those Christians who are actuated by truly Christian sentiments: a disinterested love of our neighbor seems to him the most unrelenting persecution of the Jews."

2. About Shylock's intellect and point of view toward life, he says: "Shylock is a man of information, in his own way, even a thinker, only he has not discovered the region where human feelings dwell; his morality is founded on the disbelief in goodness and magnanimity."

3. At the Trial-scene he shows us that "the letter of the law is his idol; he refuses to lend an ear to the voice of mercy, which, from the mouth of Portia speaks to him with heavenly eloquence".

4. Schlegel regards the Jew, although strongly individual, as the type and symbol of his race. "He insists on rigid and inflexible justice, and at last it recoils on his own head. Thus he becomes a symbol of the general history of his unfortunate nation." "Shylock is everything but a common Jew: He possesses a strongly-marked and original individuality, and yet we perceive a light touch of Judaism in everything he says or does."

On the character of Antonio, Schlegel makes two observations:

1. "The melancholy and self-sacrificing magnanimity of Antonio is affectingly sublime."

2. "Like a princely merchant, he is surrounded by a whole train of noble friends."

After making the second comment on the nobility of Antonio, Schlegel falls into an apparently unconscious attempt to get at the

art of Shaksperc by pointing out the contrast which this character forms with the Jew: "The contrast which this forms to the selfish cruelty of the usurer, Shylock, was necessary to redeem the honor of human nature." Similarly Schlegel has added five valuable observations on the dramatic structure of the play:

1. The saving of a too tragic effect is brought about by the artist by offsetting the anxiety we feel for Antonio's danger with the scenes at Portia's country-seat, which "transports the spectator into quite another world". And yet they are closely connected with the main business by the chain of cause and effect: Bassanio's preparations for his courtship are the cause of Antonio's subscribing the dangerous bond, and Portia again by the counsel and advice of her uncle, a famous lawyer, effects the safety of her lover's friend.

2. "The trial between Shylock and Antonio is indeed recorded as being a real event, still, for all that, it must ever remain, an unheard-of and singular case. Shakespeare has, therefore, associated it with a love intrigue not less extraordinary: the one consequently is rendered natural and probable by means of the other."

3. "The two scenes in which first the Prince of Morocco, in the language of Eastern hyperbole, and then the self-conceited Prince of Arragon, make their choice of caskets serve merely to raise our curiosity, and give employment to our wits." "But on the third where the two lovers stand trembling before the inevitable choice, which in one moment must unite or separate them for ever, Shakespeare has lavished all the charms of feeling — all the magic of poesy."

4. The artistic importance of the fifth act is pointed out by Schlegel. "But the poet was unwilling to dismiss his audience with the gloomy impression which Antonio's acquittal, effected with so much difficulty and the condemnation of Shylock, were inculcated to leave behind them; he has therefore added a fifth act by way of a musical afterlude in the piece itself."

5. On the Jessica episode, the critic says: "The episode of Jessica, the fugitive daughter of the Jew, in whom Shakespeare has contrived to throw a veil of sweetness over the national features, and the artifice of Portia — — — supply him with the necessary materials."

With this review of Schlegel's opinions we are now in a position to summarize the tendencies of criticism at the very start of the nineteenth century. The earliest period expressed admiration for certain passages in the play, such as Portia's mercy speech and Lorenzo's speech on the power of music. The learned editors pointed out certain inconsistencies in the story. Several cases have been recorded where the critics have referred to the intention of the poet in matters of characterization. Zachary Grey observed what he thought was an inconsistency in characterization. The avowed purpose of Mrs. Griffith's book was to moralize on scenes and characters in the play. Schlegel's viewpoint was impressionistic so far as observing traits of character and motives for actions. The great value of his work lies in the comments made on the dramatic structure of the play. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, therefore, we see the following tendencies in the interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*:

Tendencies
in
Criticism

1. Admiration for the poetical beauty of separate passages
2. Moralizing on scenes and characters in the play
3. Impressionistic interpretation of characters and action
4. Pointing out inconsistencies and improbabilities
5. Attempting to find Shakspeare's intention
6. Observing points in dramatic structure

The third category seems to have been the main guide for most of the character interpretation throughout the century. For the purpose of reviewing what the critics of this century had to say on the characterization in *The Merchant of Venice*, their opinions will be placed under separate problems; and these problems will be discussed later (chapter V) from a more rational criterion.

SHYLOCK

I. SHYLOCK'S MOTIVES AGAINST ANTONIO —

William Hazlitt, who was more impressionistic than either Coleridge or Schlegel, was disposed to sympathize with Shylock. He thought the Jew was justified in his attack on Antonio. He calls him "a good hater" and a man "no less sinned against than sinning". The revenge of course was taken too far; yet, "he has strong grounds for 'the lodged hate he bears Antonio'".

Augustine Skottowe, who wrote in 1824, pointed out that the strongest motives are given to Shylock, in order to make his hatred seem more natural. "With consummate judgment, there, has Shakspeare ascribed Shylock's actions to this powerful combination of malignant passions, making their union the basis of that 'lodged hate, and certain loathing' which he bears to the person of Antonio. Avarice and religious animosity are the ruling passions of the monster's mind". These are the motives which caused him to attack Antonio so treacherously.

Nathan Drake had a different point of view in explaining the motives in Shylock's breast. While giving him the passions of avarice and revenge which are natural to a Jew, Shakspeare greatly exaggerated these passions, in order to satisfy the rooted prejudices of his age. By giving Shylock an unnatural malice, a picture of the personification of evil itself is presented to us. Drake thought that Shylock's character represents Judaism, but in a form, "demonized, individualized, and rendered awfully striking and horribly appalling by the attribution of such unrelenting malice, as we will hope, for the honor of our species, was never yet accumulated, with such intensity, in any human breast".

When we examine the opinions of Charles Knight on Shylock's hatred, we are at once aware that this critic is trying to give us a larger understanding of the Jew's position in the Christian world. Instead of looking at the worse side of Jewish

¹ *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, p. 222.

² *The Life of William Shakspeare*, p. 324.

³ *Shakspeare and His Times*, p. 527.

nature as did Skottowe and Drake, Knight seems to take this for granted and goes further into the moral relations between the Christian and the Jew. Twenty-five years previous to the publication of Knight's views Hazlitt had given us a merely surface-impression of what the romantic period could see in Shylock. That period could only sympathize with him to the extent that he was "a good hater" and a man "no less sinned against than sinning". This sentimental and half-hearted way of viewing the wrongs done to Shylock was deepened into a genuine sympathy by Knight who represents the views of his times. Moreover, Knight frankly stated that the impression of sympathy which the figure of Shylock evokes was the effect that Shakspeare himself intended to produce on the audience. By Lorenzo he is called a "faithless Jew" and by Solanio, "the villain Jew" and "the dog Jew," at a time when Shylock had not yet manifested the worst spirit of revenge. "We can understand," says Knight, "the reproaches that are heaped upon Shylock in the trial scene, as something that might come out of the depths of any passion-stirred nature: but the habitual contempt with which he is treated by men who in every other respect are gentle and good-humored and benevolent is a proof to us that Shakspeare meant to represent the struggle that must inevitably ensue, in a condition of society where the innate sense of justice is deadened in the powerful by those hereditary prejudices which make cruelty virtue; and where the powerless, invested by accident with the means of revenge, say with Shylock, 'the villainy you teach me I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction'⁴." After this fine observation in which the intention of Shakespeare is aimed at, Knight unfortunately sees through the hatred and malice in Shylock to a higher purpose in the mind of the dramatist of making him a national hero—thus justifying his cruelty. This view is a reaction against Skottowe and Drake and shows a definite tendency to think favorably of Shylock's attitude toward the Christians.

⁴ *Studies of Shakspeare*, p. 357.

H. N. Hudson also regards the hatred against Shylock's nation as sufficient grounds for the Jew's criminal actions. Attempting to apply practical psychology, he sees in Shylock a man whose nature is forced to react violently against the hatred aimed at him because he is a Jew. But it is not his Jewish nature that reacts; anyone in his position would do as he does. But through all his malignity one is constantly moved with a feeling of pity. In thus bringing out our feelings for a man who is forced by circumstances to commit crime, Shakspeare makes us appreciate Shylock as he himself appreciated him.

Karl Elze, trying to soften the terrible revenge in the Jew's heart, explains the motives which have developed the "subcutaneous ulcer" in him. Antonio "has interfered with his sole means of making money (he has hindered him half a million) has in public heaped him with abuse, kicked him, and spat upon his beard".

G. G. Gervinus seems to take neither side. Shylock "hates indeed the Christians as Christians, and therefore Antonio who has mistreated him; but he hates him far more because by disinterestedness, by what he calls 'low simplicity', he destroys his business, because he lends out money gratis, brings down the rate of usance, and has lost him half a million". The flight of his daughter seems to have increased the Jew's vengeance. "He pants for revenge against Antonio even before there is any prospect of it, against the man who by long mortification had stirred up rage and hatred in the bosom of the Jew, and with whose removal his usury would be without an adversary."

D. J. Snider thinks that the personal animosity between the two was meant to exemplify a conflict between Christianity and Judaism. It is therefore natural that Snider should regard Shylock as more tragic than comic. "It is the conflict of two hostile moralities, and the struggle is ethical rather than religious." In the eyes of Snider the play becomes a tragedy, as the Jew is simply carrying out principles of life which he inherited and for which he is not responsible.

Our next critic, M. Jastrow, believes that Shakspeare planned the work in the best way that would bring out a strong psychological motive for Shylock's actions. He found in the Jew a favorable figure because he could easily be given an intense feeling of hatred against a Christian adversary. The motives for Shylock's murderous intent are derived from the different principles of life of Christians and Jews. Shylock, the usurer, hates the merchant. Race prejudice and religious hatred give added heat to their mutual hostility. Antonio first evinces his hostility toward Shylock who then waits for and meditates revenge. The Jew does not intend to exact the horrible penalty, when the bond is made; he merely wants Antonio humiliated. When his daughter takes flight, he puts the blame on the Christians and his revenge hardens into murder.

G. H. Radford's opinion concerning Shylock's conflict with Antonio is that he (Shylock) is made villain enough to carry on the play but still not dangerous to a happy ending. Shylock seems to have been to the critic only an instrument by which Shakspeare could build up a tragic story. Being a Jew at a time when Jews were despised it was not strange that Shylock was chosen as the rival of the Christian merchant. The hatred between the two is not a deep-seated one; Shylock's profits as a money-lender has been cut down by Antonio's charitable methods of business. The hatred, therefore, has grown out of their commercial activities.

George Brandes speaks of Shylock's hatred as more intense than his avarice. The hatred, originating in the differences of business methods and the natural dislike of Jew for Christian, is turned into revenge and murderous intent by the robbery of his money and his daughter's flight. He has become a monster through a chain of circumstances culminating in his daughter's marriage to a Christian.

2. HIS INTELLECT. — Writing in 1817, Hazlitt remarked thus on Shylock's mental ability: "The keenness of his revenge awakes all his faculties; and he beats back all opposition to his purpose, whether grave or gay, whether of wit

or argument, with an equal degree of earnestness and self-possession." Skottowe is more analytical in discussing the Jew's mental powers: "His fierceness, cruelty, and relentlessness are dignified by intellectual vigour. His actions are deliberate, they are the emanations of his bold and masculine understanding. Let the art with which he negotiates his bond be contemplated; consider his coolness, his plausible exaggeration of the dangers to which Antonio's property is subjected; his bitter sarcasms and insulting gibes; all efforts of the mind to induce a belief of his indifference, and to disguise his real design: follow him into court, behold him maintaining his superiority in argument, unmoved by insult and unawed by power, till disappointment leaves him nothing to contend for, and anguish stops his speech, and then let his claims to intellectual distinction be decided on."

H. Ulrici's estimation of the character of Shylock is that he is a portrayal of the low, degenerate type of Jew who still retained certain features of endurance and religious strictness, inherited from the grand biblical figures of Moses, David, etc. This critic's idea of Shylock's personality is the very finest example of Shakespere's power to captivate the imagination of the reader. To Ulrici the figure of the Jew is clothed in an atmosphere of poetic beauty. He typifies the "pitiful, decayed ruin of a grand past, the glimmering spark of a vanquished splendor, which, although it can no longer give warmth and life can nevertheless burn and destroy". His common-sense and shrewdness which take the form of subtle humor, are the outstanding qualities of his mind. In his murderous intent upon Antonio, he cunningly justifies his vengeance under the guise of legality. Ulrici observes also in the Jew a great amount of humor and sarcasm.

Lloyd, who assigns everything that Shylock does to the worse side of Jewish character, thinks that Shylock's mind is wholly taken up with the sanctity with which he holds the law. As he has sworn an oath by the saored Sabbath to carry out the reading of the law, he bends all his intellect to accomplish

that purpose. With his mind so constituted, "he has no sense of the ends for which law was framed".

Knight does not discern anything despicable or treacherous in Shylock's mode of reasoning. On the contrary he is captivated by the great power of his intellect which he regards as far greater than that of his opponents. "He defends his own injustice by the example of as great an injustice of everyday occurrence — and no one ventures to answer him:

"You have among you many a purchas'd slave,
Which, like your asses, and your dogs, and mules,
You use in abject and in slavish parts,
Because you bought them: — Shall I say to you,
Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?"

H. N. Hudson regarded the strong intellectuality of Shylock as the out-standing quality that reflects his individuality. His reasoning, however, was not unanswerable to Hudson's mind as it was to Knight's. The Jew's firmness is due mainly to mule-like stubbornness. His wilfulness keeps him unmoved from his purpose.

Charles Cowden Clarke lays most stress in his discussion of the play,⁵ on the "grand principle" which it preaches. It is a "homily upon injustice to each sect". This is done principally through the character of Shylock, who expresses the finest sentiments in the play. The strongest case is made out for Shylock; throughout the play he has the advantage in the argument. Even Shylock's speech in which he defends himself on the grounds of "an eye for an eye", argument, is a "strong extenuation for that age".

3. HOME LIFE. — In commenting on the relations between Shylock and Jessica, Ulrici regards the former as a loving and protecting father. He guards her "as the apple of his eye, and seeks to protect against the baneful influences of her surroundings, and his faithful attachment to the religion and customs of his ancestors, which he considers as more important

⁵ *Shakespeare-Characters.*

than profit and honor, show us a couple of purely human motives, which, to some extent, moderate what is repulsive in his sentiments and mode of action".

The only place where Karl Elze does not have any sympathy for Shylock is in his remarks on the Jew's home life. This view, opposite as it is to that of Ulrici, shows clearly how some critics are influenced only by the impression which the characters make on them. Elze sees no lovingness in the Jew as Ulrici does. The hardness of his mind, his selfishness and bitterness, have all entered his home. He has no feeling for Jessica; she is only the keeper of his house. She is practically a prisoner and the unloving attitude of father for daughter has produced a want of filial feeling on her part. He is made wrathful at the flight not because he is robbed of his child, but because the gems have disappeared.

To M. Jastrow who wrote on Shylock in 1880 comfort for the Jew at home ceased to exist when Leah, his wife, died. The unfavorable impression that he has of Jessica will be given in his own words: "His daughter might have been a comfort and stay to his old age, but she seems to have been reared by his lazy, gluttonous servant, and she was therefore influenced more by Launcelot, than by her own father, who spent his days in the street and on change. Through Launcelot, the idle pleasure-seeker, she has become acquainted with the world of the Christians, so different from the Jews."

4. THE TRIAL SCENE. — Schlegel, commenting on the trial scene in the early part of the nineteenth century was impressed by two things: its realistic setting though the case is improbable, and the association with it of a love intrigue. Hazlitt, writing in the same period, was impressed by the triumphant defense of the Jew and belittled the victory of Portia because it is gained only through a "legal-flaw".

Charles Knight very interestingly tries to seek Shakspeare's purpose in the matter. It is his belief that the trial-scene was meant to show the ingrained prejudice and hate of both parties. "Had Shylock relented after that most beautiful appeal to his

mercy, which Shakspeare has here placed as the exponent of the higher principle upon which all law and right are essentially dependent, the real moral of the drama would have been destroyed."

Elze in his usual sympathy for Shylock turns everything at the trial-scene against the Christians. The following statement made by the Doge is, in his opinion, not true:

That thou shalt see the difference of our spirits,

I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it. (IV, i., 366—7.)

Portia first makes the Jew forfeit his possessions and life, but finally his life is spared. Antonio returns him half of his possessions until death. This is regarded as a mild punishment but the Jew takes it very heavily:

Nay, take my life and all; pardon not that.

Then Shylock is made to become a Christian. This means moral annihilation. There is no "conciliatory love" here. "The sentence of death," says Elze, "would have been mild compared to this torture. However grievously Shylock may have offended, however heartily we despise and condemn his character, yet we cannot avoid a momentary feeling of sympathy for him when he straggles out of the court."

D. J. Snider insists on emphasizing the subjective side of Shylock's character. At the trial-scene the false principles, which had become a part of Shylock's very nature, crumbles under a new standard of life. The real principle by which Shylock was arraigned is based on the intention to commit murder regardless of the lawfulness of the act. This is a Christian principle and lies beyond the conception of one who has lived under the formal Jewish law.

G. H. Radford remarks on the unexpected change in emotional feeling at the trial-scene, after Shylock suddenly yields. The whole scene is worked out from a dramatic standpoint. Antonio in the end must be saved; so after Shylock has served as a villain, the trick is suddenly turned against him.

5. THE USURER — It was the opinion of Joseph Hunter that Shylock's business as a usurer is responsible for most of

the indignation against him. It is true that Shylock himself refers all his troubles to a strong antipathy to his race but a study of the play will show that Shakspeare's purpose was to emphasize the Jew's usury. Lloyd also expresses the same opinion pointing out further that his business as usurer involved all the evils of dishonesty, cruelty, fraud, etc.

Victor Hugo regards Shylock as a type of what people hate mostly in the Jewish character. The culminating idea which gradually smothers out everything else in his nature is the wrong done to his practice of usury. "Sum up usury, you have Shylock. The metaphor of the people who are never mistaken confirms unawares the invention of the poet; and while Shakespeare makes Shylock, the popular tongue creates the bloodsucker⁶." The Judaism which Shylock stood for is not typical — not even of the medieval Jew — but is only that of the low usurer. A recent critic⁷ sees Shylock as a typical Jew but the evil side of the Jewish nation which is rooted in love for money is over-emphasized.

6. HIS ENFORCED CONVERSION — The first clearly stated opinion we have on the despoiling of Shylock at the end of the trial-scene was given by H. N. Hudson, who regarded it as proof that the Christians in the story are as cruel as Shylock himself. "The mercy extended to Shylock after he has fallen from his high-wrought hopes of revenge, appears but little better than his revenge itself; for it is obviously resorted to as the only means of adding still further to his humiliation. His enemies turn from persecution to kindness, when kindness itself is the cruelest persecution, and readily grant him life, when they have rendered life a burden to him, and he, in the bitterness of despair, has prayed for death⁸." The kindness shown to Shylock, according to Hudson, is only a sham. Pure kindness would have been more of a rebuke to the Jew than the masking of cruelty in the guise of charity.

⁶ *William Shakespeare*, p. 224.

⁷ Stopford Brooke.

⁸ *Lectures on Shakspeare*, p. 310.

In his discussion of the conversion of Shylock at the end of the trial-scene, Karl Elze's mind went back to the practice in the Middle Ages of forcing conversion on Jews. The church of the Middle Ages believed that only Christians could partake of salvation; so the work of forcing the faith on non-Christians was considered meritorious. But what is striking in Elze's discussion at this point is that he declares Shakspeare an exception to his age in this belief. Elze cannot come to the conclusion that he really wished to furnish his groundlings with a subject for uproarious laughter. A suggestion of the dramatist's own views is given in the conversation between Launcelot and Jessica (III, v). In this scene the discussion turns on Jessica's status as a Christian. Her claim is in her conversion through marriage with her Christian husband. Although Launcelot is a comic character the humorous vein to this conversation must not cloud the serious, which, according to Elze, should be interpreted to mean that Shakspeare here disapproves of the change of religion imposed on Shylock.

One is at first surprised that Elze who knows the historical facts about the condition of the Jews in the Middle Ages should have been led to misinterpret Shakspeare's purpose; but like all the commentators of the century he could not shake off the feeling that Shakspeare was above the common prejudices of his day. A more recent critic, George Brandes, has fallen into the same error as Elze. He recognizes the historical basis for Antonio's mandate that Shylock become a Christian. "This is done for his good"; says Brandes, "for baptism opens to him the possibility of salvation after death". But Brandes does not allow us to believe that Shakspeare himself shared such a fanatical view.

7. THE ADVOCATE AND AVENGER OF HIS RACE

— Should we picture Shylock as brooding over the insults and injuries heaped upon him by mankind? There is in the Jew a deep sense of justice because we feel that his desire for revenge is inseparable from the sense of wrong done him. The appeal to the Jew's mercy at the trial scene and elsewhere Hazlitt

termed "rankest hypocrisy" and he was affected favorably by the Jew's reply: "Hath not a Jew eyes, etc." This remarkable speech by Shylock evoked the sympathy of C. A. Brown who spoke of the forceful language in which it is couched. But to Brown the sympathy we feel for him at this point does not mitigate our feeling of horror at his vengeful intentions.

Birch, whose opinions are recorded in Furness' *Variorum*, is interested in the play only in so far as it reflects Shakspeare's attitude toward religion. He observes that Shylock's speeches are recapitulations of the injuries done him by the Christians. The emphasis is on this hostility of Antonio and his company, which finally provokes revenge in the Jew. Likewise Charles Knight sees in Shylock a man provoked to crime by social circumstances and the speech beginning, "I am a Jew," means that we should excuse him for his passionate feeling of revenge. Society, then, is responsible for what Shylock is. Lloyd and Giles both conclude that the wrongs and injuries inflicted on the whole Jewish race have been concentrated in the person of Shylock. The following picture given by Lloyd is a grand conception of what Shylock stands for; but it cannot be correct in the case of a practical dramatist like Shakspeare: "The plea of the Jew in exacting forfeiture of the bond, is the epitome of the very history and genius of Judaism regarded from its most unfavorable side, bigoted reliance in the fulfilment of precept by the letter, and disregard of spirit and purpose, and obstinate claim of privilege by interpretation of terms in covenant or bond, to the neglect of the foregone intention of the bond, in subjection to which alone it can reasonably be valid. All are familiar with the spirit of Pharisaism to claim privilege by natural descent from the favored Abraham, and to disallow in others the value of the very qualities to which the favor of Abraham was ascribed; to cleanse the outside of the platter and to be scrupulous of days and meats, but take little thought of the impurities of the heart⁹."

Charles Cowden Clarke was another of Shylock's defenders.

⁹ Furness, *Variorum* p. 429.

He deduces from the play that Shylock's morality has resulted from centuries of Christian injustice against the hated race. The story of Shylock is a moral lesson taught by Shakspeare, in which the final punishment is an act of justice for all his cruelty, but in which merciful sympathy is no less emphasized. Karl Elze is a critic who has a better scholarly equipment than Clarke. He cannot make any sweeping statement as to Shakspeare's moral intentions in the play. Knowing well the social and dramatic conditions of the sixteenth century, his opinions are more sound than the other critics of his time. He refuses to reconcile the attitude of the audience with Shakspeare's purpose. Elze's greatest error is his belief that Shakspeare did not sympathize with his audience in the deeper conceptions of the play. Modern scholarship questions whether Shakspeare had any deep meanings in his plays at all; and if so they were all fashioned after the will of his audience. The German scholar falls in line with other commentators in making Shylock the representative of Judaism in its lowest degradation. The Jew cannot be wholly to blame for his actions as he had inherited and grown up under the letter of the Mosaic religion.

Frederick Hawkins in *The Theatre* magazine for November 1879 vigorously declared that Shakspeare thoroughly sympathized with the Jews of his day. The humanizing element, he states, can be clearly felt if we allow ourselves to read between the lines. Shakspeare "saw the Jews as they were, and so seeing them wrote *The Merchant of Venice* in order to exhibit one of their number at a disadvantage". He showed rare moral courage in allowing Shylock to utter such touching appeals as he does at a time within four years of the Lopes affair.

Hawkins' article brought out a strong protest from James Spedding, which appeared in the next issue of *The Theatre* magazine. He did not believe that Shakspeare had the least idea of toleration in his mind. Shylock is a plotting, scheming Jew whom the people of Shakspeare's day regarded as typical of the Jew they knew in real life. In a modern Christian audience a good actor can work on the feelings of the people; in Shaks-

pere's case, however, he would not have dared to suggest toleration to a public prejudiced against Jews.

D. J. Snider regards Shylock as the type of his race. He exemplifies all the peculiarities of that peculiar race. The Jewish faith "is not a religion of propagandism, and thus avoids any struggle with dominant systems". As for Shylock, "he possesses that happy admixture of stubbornness and submission which has kept him from being destroyed on the one hand, and from being absorbed on the other". The religious beliefs of Shylock are brought out more prominently than those of Antonio, but "only for the purpose of showing the moral consequences of that system of belief".

The more modern critics, George Brandes and Stopford Brooke, carry on the same sentiment: that Shakespeare meant Shylock to represent the sorrows and degradation of his race.

ANTONIO

It is always dangerous when meditating on any of Shakespere's plays to picture a character as a living individual. Dramatic characters are never fashioned by an author in this light. Every action or sentiment must be interpreted in its bearing on the movements of other characters in the play. It is particularly true of Shakespere's plays that each figure is thus made to *fit into* the play. There is no better example in Shakespere of this artificial manufacture of a character to suit the play than Antonio. He is very incompletely drawn and if we attempt to disengage him from the play and picture him as a living person, we fall into errors of interpretation. He is sad to extreme; he has a strong friendship for Bassanio; he is noble and honest; and he is hostile minded toward Shylock. That is all there is to him. He is not a complete individual, but only a cluster of traits or instincts which the dramatist needed for the story of the bond. How a few of the nineteenth century critics have explained these traits of character will now be recorded.

1. THE SADNESS OF ANTONIO — The interesting but unnatural melancholy of Antonio was not a subject of much

comment in the early part of the nineteenth century. Drake spoke of the "sublime resignation" of the merchant and contrasted it with the hatred of his prosecutor. Hunter thought the sadness at the beginning of the play is dramatically correct because it is a suitable introduction to the serious character of the bond-story.

Birch, who investigates the religious sentiments in the plays, thinks bigotry and melancholy are the two outstanding qualities in Antonio's character. The latter quality represents Shakespere's view of religion.

Charles Knight asserts that there is a definite cause for Antonio's sadness. He disagrees with the contemporary German critic, Ulrici, that it is due to an over-burdened responsibility of great wealth. From the lips of Antonio himself we learn that the fear of losing his merchandize on the high seas is at the bottom of his sadness. Though he says:

In sooth, I know not why I am so sad;

he actually reasons about the state of his mind in four places. His endangered riches are:

Enough to press a royal merchant down, —

When he denies any worry about his cargoes, it appears to us, so Knight says, to be self delusion:

My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,

Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate

Upon the fortune of this present year:

Therefore, my merchandize makes me not sad.

At the moment that he binds himself to the Jew, his confidence of the safe return of his ships is only a desperate one:

Why, fear not, man; I will not forfeit it;

Within these two months, that's a month before

This bond expires, I do expect return

Of thrice three times the value of this bond.

Finally, when calamity has come upon him, the following utterance shows that the trend of his mind has long been haunted by the notion of ruin:

Give me your hand, Bassanio; fare you well!
 Grieve not that I am fallen to this for you;
 For herein fortune shows herself more kind
 Than is her custom: it is still her use
 To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,
 To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow,
 An age of poverty; from which lingering penance
 Of such misery doth she cut me off.

The generosity of the merchant ill fits him for the circumstances in which he finds himself. It is the cause of enhancing the Jew's hatred:

In low simplicity,
 He lends out money gratis.

Shylock again expresses his hatred for the merchant's kind spirit:

This is the fool that lends out money gratis.

Knight's concluding thought on the matter is that Antonio keenly realizes that his nature is not in harmony with his position.

The only comment Hudson makes on Antonio's disposition, in his early lectures on Shakspeare's writings (1848), is that "his pensive, yet gentle warm-hearted sadness forms a fine contrast to the icy intellectuality of old Shylock, beautifully illustrative of the difference between the Christian and the Jewish religion". We have already noticed that Drake contrasted the pensiveness of Antonio with the Jew's hatred. The general notion concerning the difference between the Christian and the Jewish religions which Hudson tacks on at the end of the statement just quoted, is illustrative of the tendency of his time to generalize. But this general looseness of interpretation goes to the extreme in the case of Karl Elze, a critic who in many cases shows much historical knowledge. The problem of Antonio's sadness is solved simply by saying that wealth blunted his feelings and made him effeminate. This solution is poor enough but this critic's next statement is startlingly wild: "Besides, he has no family for whose future he would have to provide, and in whose success he could take delight."

G. G. Gervinus does not decide on any one cause for the mysterious sadness. He suggests that great riches have inflicted this malady on him. No one knows the source of his sadness but he seems to have a presentiment of evil. Furthermore, "the position which the poet has given him in the midst of the more active characters of the piece is an especially happy one; for were he of less negative greatness he would throw all others into deep shadow; we should feel too painful and exciting a sympathy in his subsequent danger."

D. J. Snider assigns the cause of his sadness to "a dissatisfaction with his calling; it cannot satisfy the highest wants of man". This explanation is new, while M. Jastrow goes back to the old reason of the loss of the ships but involves himself in so much psychology that his picture of the deep melancholy overshadowing the mind of the merchant is quite unacceptable.

The opinion of George Brandes is new because of his usual point of view of explaining everything in terms of Shakespere's own career. Shakespere's soul was still joyous at this period of his career and Antonio's melancholy is an undercurrent to this joy. The same touch of sadness is found in Jacques in *As You Like It*, in the Duke in *Twelfth Night*, and in Hamlet.

Both Stopford Brooke and F. S. Boas are aware of the artistic use of the sadness as a presentiment of evil, though each has an additional explanation. The former speaks of Antonio's weariness of large business affairs; the latter, of a hypochondriacal seizure to which all successful men are at times subject.

2. FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN ANTONIO AND BASSANIO — It is strange that not more than brief remarks constitute all the attention of early writers on a friendship that is as deep and romantic as that between Antonio and Bassanio. It is spoken of as the "purest spirit of Friendship" that "glows" within the breast of Antonio. It blended into a love that gives a sombre sweetness to the play; which tone serves as an effective contrast with the hard and selfish nature of Shylock.

Gervinus was interested in the test of friendship which comes when Bassanio receives intelligence of Antonio's danger at the

very moment that he is betrothed to Portia. On the wedding-day Portia and Bassanio agree to postpone the marriage and to rush to Antonio's assistance with three times the amount of money borrowed. After their friendship had been proved, Antonio finds renewed life in his friend's happiness.

3. HIS NOBILITY AND HONESTY — Like the romantic friendship, the nobility and honesty that characterize Antonio received little comment from the writers of the last century. The significance of these elements as sixteenth century conventions will be pointed out in a later chapter. Early commentators noted briefly the high and generous character of the "royal merchant". Hudson philosophized on him as "a noble unambitious merchant, who seems to covet wealth only as a means of gratifying his generosity; and his friends obviously love him for what he is, not for what he has¹⁰". Hudson cannot speak too highly of Antonio. Snider too is charmed by the nobleness of his character. He points out the contrast between the Christian and the Jew. Antonio exemplifies a way of living that is above property. "A general spirit of brotherhood and generosity animates all his actions, with one very striking exception; a liberality, which we may fairly call Christian, is ingrained into his very nature, and is the well-spring of his conduct in his dealings with his fellow-men¹¹." He uses his money only as a means of enjoying life and of making the lives of others happy. He is the embodiment of the principle: "Without charity I am nothing."

The reader of this book must be on his guard against a misunderstanding of the sentiments expressed by these commentators on the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio and the nobility of the merchant. They are not to be taken as thoughts that were entertained by Shakspeare himself at the time that he wrote the play. Although the romantic period seems to credit Shakspeare with most of this sentimental philosophy, these senti-

¹⁰ *Lectures on Shakspeare*, p. 316.

¹¹ *System of Shakspeare's Dramas*, p. 307.

ments are nothing more than their own individual impressions of the play. What Shakspeare thought is a kind of interpretation that will be treated in this book later.

4. HIS ANIMOSITY TOWARD SHYLOCK — Hazlitt cited the passage: "To spit on thee again, etc." as showing that Antonio's hatred is as deep as Shylock's. Other early commentators spoke almost as briefly as did Hazlitt on this phase of Antonio's nature. Brown thought that the harsh treatment suffered by Shylock is responsible in great part for our taking sides with the usurer.

Birch seems to be still more emphatic about Antonio's malignity. Antonio, representing the Christian attitude, frankly tells the Jew he would repeat the injuries, although he wants the money badly and at last even accepts the loan. He is a bigot in spirit who "cannot think a man capable of virtue, unless religious in the same sense as himself, and assigns the evidence of the Jew's kindness as a certainty of his approaching conversion to Christianity, 'Hie thee, gentle Jew'."

Charles Knight is of the opinion that Shakspeare's purpose in making Antonio spiteful against the Jew, was to make the intolerance between Christians and Jews mutual and thereby teach us a lesson in charity. Here is a good example of a critic attempting to identify Shakspeare's purpose with an impression of his own for which there is no proof. "Was it without an object that Shakspeare made this man, so entitled to command our affections and our sympathy, act so unworthy a part, and not be ashamed of the act? Most assuredly the poet did not intend to justify the indignities which were heaped upon Shylock; for in the very strongest way he has made the Jew remember the insult in the progress of his wild revenge:

Thou call'dst me dog, before thou hadst a cause:

But, since I am a dog, beware my fangs.

Here, to our minds, is the first of the lessons of charity which this play teaches. Antonio is as much to be pitied for his prejudices as the Jew for his. They had both been nurtured in evil opinions.

They had both been surrounded by influences which more or less held in subjection their better natures¹²."

Hudson accounts for Antonio's treatment of Shylock on historical grounds. Both parties are the victims of the long traditional hatred existing against the Jewish nation.

Antonio's animosity impresses Gervinus as being very intense because it originated in moral as well as business principles. As a punishment for his harsh treatment of the Jew, he is brought to the brink of tragedy in the lawsuit with the Jew. Snider likewise ponders on the sufferings of Antonio, but he has an explanation for it that is somewhat different from that of the German critic. The Merchant's principles of life are the very best, so that his unmerciful attitude toward the Jew is one case where he flagrantly violates his own moral standards; hence the guilt that deserves punishment.

George Brandes' opinion on the matter is that Antonio cannot be held faultless for all the abuse heaped on Shylock. But Shakspeare must be cleared of having any share in the prejudice of the Christians against the Jews. The spitefulness exhibited by Antonio is a picture of mediaeval prejudice, something entirely different from Shakspeare's attitude.

PORTIA

1. HER LOVE FOR BASSANIO — After the right casket has been chosen by Bassanio, several long speeches by the lovers reveal a great deal of the sentiment existing between them. Portia's whole surrender of herself is very affecting, "for," says Mrs. Jameson in her delightful book, "not only all the tenderness and delicacy of a devoted woman, are here blended with all the dignity which becomes the princely heiress of Belmont, but the serious, measured self-possession of her address to her lover, when all suspense is over, and all concealment superfluous, is most beautifully consistent with the character¹³".

It will be admitted by everyone that this description of

¹² *Studies of Shakspeare*, p. 356.

¹³ *Characteristics of Women*, (Portia), p. 24.

Portia is an ideal picture of her. Nothing better could be said about any woman. Unfortunately, however, critics are not content to accept her solely for what she is, but they have all taken their turn in philosophizing about her loveliness. Cowden Clarke sees Portia's unselfish desire to sympathize with her husband's friend as the greatest proof of her love. Portia feels the anxiety that Bassanio has for his friend and is willing to part from his society at the demand of friendship. For her husband's sake she warmly urges him: "Oh! love, despatch all business and begone!" She certainly is not a pedantic woman when "the modesty of wifely affection," impels her "to share at least the griefs in the lot of him she loves".

Gervinus thinks Portia is the intellectual superior of Bassanio, but "to this man of her heart Portia represents herself as a rough jewel, although she is far superior to him; she gives herself to him with the most womanly modesty, although she is capable rather of guiding him". A curious point which Gervinus observes is that Portia, at the time she is worried over the safety of the merchant, makes plans for testing the man of her love. Amidst the intense scene of the trial she works out the ring incident as a means of determining the value of his love.

After her whole inner struggle during the casket scene to effect a rational marriage, Portia is henceforth wholly in sympathy with Bassanio. D. J. Snider is impressed with the way this brilliant lady makes all of her husband's troubles her own, and tries to solve them in her own way.

When fortune has smiled on Bassanio in the casket scene, Portia becomes Shakspeare's ideal of womanhood. But the ideal is not a permanent one in Brandes' opinion. The dramatist held different views about women according to the natural development of his mind. He could at one period of his life regard the passionate type like Juliet as his ideal; at another, the intellectual type, which he embodies in Portia.

Stopford Brooke notes a vein of Italian blood in Portia, showing itself in her confessional speech before the caskets.

Yet the hesitency and restraint contained in these give her the necessary touch of dignity and grace.

2. CHOICE OF CASKETS — The device of choosing a husband by having the suitors select the right casket has been the centre of much comment during our period. The scene in which it is used is filled with the emotions of the two lovers whose fate hangs on mere chance. Schlegel was enthusiastic over the scene where the success of Bassanio brings forth the rapturous speeches of the lovers. On the other hand, Hazlitt stated frankly that the casket-scene had no interest for him.

Mrs. Jameson, whose authority on feminine matters should be the very best, speaks very feelingly of the telltale utterances of Portia just before Bassanio chooses the casket:

I pray you, tarry; pause a day or two, etc.

Here we have "the conflict between love and fear, and maidenly dignity," which "cause the most delicious confusion that ever tinged a woman's cheek, or dropped in broken utterance from her lips".

The scene is mentioned by H. N. Hudson as purely a dramatic device to save Portia from the princely suitors. By so leaving her fate to the caskets an opportunity is given for her to express the duty she owes her father. The wealth of poetry woven into the scene enhances the dramatic value of the caskets by obscuring their improbability.

Elze has tried to explain the casket-scene in a way that would save Portia's character. He interprets this scene from the point of view of the heroine's father. The death of her father has undeniably given her an inner as well as an external independence. Here we have circumstances that would inevitably give her character a slight touch of the masculine. Her father saw this objectionable condition and devised a way out of it for his daughter. To make her dependent, therefore, on her surroundings, as befits a woman, the odd conditions of the will were devised.

Gervinus does not go into much detail about the meaning of the casket-scene but remarks that the choice of casket was

meant for Portia's own good. It prevents her from being married for her money. Another meaning of the choice of the caskets is that it is a test of Portia's moral strength. She loves Bassanio at first sight but she does not facilitate him in the choice. She longs to do so and for a time maintains a heated struggle with her feelings.

One of Snider's main objects in discussing Portia's character is to emphasize the fact that through the means of the song: "Tell me where is fancy bred," the heroine delicately directs Bassanio to the right casket. The moral drawn from this observation is typical of the way some critics have philosophized on Shakspeare: "She stands here as the grand bearer of the Right of Subjectivity, in its special form of Love versus Obedience, to the will of the parent¹⁴." Likewise George Brandes draws from this scene an ethical opinion. It expresses Shakspeare's hatred of all empty show.

3. HER INTELLIGENCE — To Portia's love for Bassanio and to the revelation of a strong feminine nature in the casket scene, has been mingled a trait which cements these together and gives Portia her strong presence of mind: an intellect that borders on the masculine. Hazlitt is probably the only commentator who decried this characteristic, referring to Portia as too pedantic in her manner.

On account of her intellectual powers Mrs. Jameson regarded Portia as the finest of Shakspeare's women. To this critic Portia's keen intellect is of a feminine cast because it is mingled with the most lovable qualities, with a romantic spirit, and with a poetical imagination. All these gifts are splendidly shown in the part she plays in the trial-scene. She tries in every way to appeal to Shylock's humanity before defeating him by a legal quibble. First she appeals to his mercy. Then, after his refusal to accept a larger payment than the principal, she uses subtler means to awaken his feelings. This is done by ordering Antonio to prepare himself, and later by entreating Shylock to have a surgeon ready. These speeches, "though

¹⁴ *System of Shakespeare's Dramas*, p. 328.

addressed apparently to Antonio, are spoken at Shylock, and are evidently intended to penetrate his bosom". For the same purpose she gives Shylock time for thought and reflection by allowing Antonio to speak his pathetic farewell to Bassanio. The lighter traits of mind are everywhere made apparent by her happy outlook on life. Living in opulence, she had never known sadness. In the casket-scene, therefore, she does not yield to her fears. Only once does she speak of Bassanio's chance of losing in his choice but the very thought itself is sweetened by a beautiful comparison of it to the swan-song. But at the thought of his winning, her excited spirit expresses itself in poetic language. Images rush to her fancy: "The bridegroom waked by music on his wedding morn — the new-crowned monarch — the comparison of Bassanio to the young Alcides, and of herself to the daughter of Laomedon."

Drake saw in the spirited figure of Portia a contrast to the hard and narrow life of Shylock. He thought her a well-rounded personality taking a prominent part in both plots and revealing either her goodness of heart or her eloquence wherever she appears.

The only comment Joseph Hunter made on Portia is that Shakspere did not use good judgment in selecting the name of the heroine. The name, Portia, has always associated with it the virtues of the Roman matron and for this reason gives too much emphasis to the masculine side of Portia's character. Although in one place Portia plays a masculine role, the principal action assigned to her reveals her as gentle and retiring.

Ulrici's impression of Portia is the same as Mrs. Jameson's whom he quotes. He observes that her character is in sharp contrast with Shylock's: "In her we have the glory of birth and inherited possessions, in him the darkness of a low, despised descent, and masses of gold accumulated with difficulty; in her the wit of poetry and the intelligence of a free, highly cultivated mind, in him the wit of malevolence, etc."

Hudson cites the character of Portia as the finest example of Shakspere's genius for picturing the highest type of woman-

hood. The type is formed by "pouring into the female character all the intellectual energy and dignity of the other sex, without expelling or obscuring, in the least degree, the essence of womanhood". This happy combination of high intelligence and gentle temperament is supreme in Portia. Her feminine sweetness, despite her strong mental powers, seems to be the burden of Hudson's discussion. Selfconscious at all times and fully aware of her gifts, she moves about confidently but without vanity.

While Hudson found no trouble in combining Portia's judge-like ability with her feminine temperament, Cowden Clarke in his discussion of the heroine tries to explain away her "manliness" altogether. While she is conducting the trial, we feel that she is compelled to act gravely by the part she has assumed, and we know that her arguments are all those of her kinsman, the learned Bellario. The manly part she plays at the trial-scene contributes to her own happiness and the happiness of those around her. Shakspeare knew that a delicate, "sick-room" type of woman would never be able to preserve human life. Portia is a wealthy lady, on the other hand; accustomed to command; she nevertheless bears her dignity without pride. A womanly modesty is noticeable in everything she says. In reply to Lorenzo, she modestly says:

He knows me, as the blind man knows the cuckoo,
By the bad voice.

She greets her husband's friend with a lady-like grace:

Sir, you are very welcome to our house:
It must appear in other ways than words;
Therefore I scant this breathing courtesy.

She speaks her love to Bassanio with maidenly modesty:

There's something tells me — but it is not love —
I would not lose you:

She is all modesty when she says of herself to her husband:

Happiest of all is, that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed,
As from her lord, her governor, her king.

On another occasion she refrains from speaking too much about herself:

This comes too near the praising of myself;
Therefore no more of it.

These examples of her modesty were cited by Clarke to refute Hazlitt's sweeping statement that Portia is all pedantry. Clarke allowed that the nearest approach to pedantry or affectation is the remark Portia makes when she returns home to Belmont:

That light we see is burning in my hall.
How far that little candle throws its beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

But this is spoken on her return from her victory at the trial-scene, and her heart is "full of pleasant reflections from having done a deed of mercy and kindness". Clarke summed up the qualities which make her a perfect woman: "She is at once grave, sedate, witty, social, humorous, cheerful, . . . she is modest, mentally and social, bounteous to prodigality." Finally she rounds out her perfect nature by proving herself a good and loving wife.

Lady Martin, as quoted by Furness in the *Variorum*, was greatly interested in the difficult part Portia played at the trial. Her explanation represents only the play of a vivid imagination on gaps in the story which the dramatist found unnecessary to fill in. She surmised very romantically what training Portia received during the period of her life before the beginning of the play and how this training prepared her for her work. "I think of her as the cherished child of a noble father, — a father proud of his child's beauty, and of the promise which he sees in her of rare gifts, both of mind and heart. These gifts he spares no pains to foster. He is himself no ordinary man. Etc." Lady Martin imagines that Portia had learned about court proceedings in her younger days. All of this antecedent matter so naively related by this interpreter shows the extreme unreasonableness to which the impressionistic method can lead the critic. Lady Martin's work has no scholarly value.

Gervinus regarded Portia, with her quick judgment and broad

knowledge of men, as mentally superior to everyone else in the play. Her appearance is, therefore, not impossible to conceive. Snider in his usual way tried to find a basis of explanation for Portia's character. One trait he attributes to her which is common to all women. In spite of all her manly acts, she never fails to subordinate herself to the family, and this trait saves her womanly character.

Brooke, too, regards her wisdom as something natural to her and not marring her womanhood. Her knowledge of the law seems to have been gotten from some previous study at Padua, as she is quite at ease while presiding at the trial.

It is a relief to find in Brandes some suggestion about Portia's character that is more substantial and that takes us away from personal opinions. Brandes says that "the poet has borrowed traits from the Italian novel in order to make her as prompt in counsel as she is magnanimous". Certainly we come closer to Shakspeare's ideas by noting characteristics in the popular literature of the sixteenth century.

4. HER WIT — It is well-nigh impossible for one to separate a person's social tact, and the touch of humor that is always an essential part of this tact, from the other activities of life. Yet wit is a positive spirit in life that is unmistakable whenever presented. In the form of good-humor it forms a delightful side of Portia's nature. To Mrs. Jameson it was bright and lady-like, without "a particle of malevolence or causticity". It has not the satirical flavor of Beatrice's wit. Ulrici was also impressed by the harmlessness of her wit; while Brandes with a broader spirit recognizes the same vein of bright temperament that runs through most of Shakspeare's heroines.

5. HER NOBILITY — For luxury in description Mrs. Jameson surpassed the other early commentators. She lavished it on the charming portrayal of Portia's personality. The following quotation attributes everything to her rich and noble surroundings: "A train of obedient pleasures have ever waited round her; and from infancy she has breathed an atmosphere redolent of perfume and blandishment. Accordingly there is a commanding grace, a

high bred, airy elegance, a spirit of magnificence in all that she does and says, as one to whom splendour had been familiar from her very birth. She treads as though her footsteps had been among marble palaces, beneath roofs of fretted gold, o'er cedar floors and pavements of jasper and porphyry — amid gardens full of statues, and flowers, and fountains, and haunting music."

Joseph Hunter compared the nobility and ease which surrounds Portia at Belmonte to Milton's Paradise. "We find ourselves transported into the grounds of an Italian palazzo of the very first class, and we soon perceive them to be of surpassing beauty and almost boundless extent. It is not a garden of parterres and flowers, but more like Milton's Paradise, full of tall shrubs and lofty trees, the tulip-tree, the poplar, and the cedar. But it is not like Milton's, a garden in which the hand of Nature is alone visible. There are terraces and flights of steps, cascades and fountains, broad walks, avenues and ridings, with alcoves and banqueting-houses in the rich architecture of Venice."

But these exquisite surroundings which Mrs. Jameson and Joseph Hunter have delightfully described, have not in the least imbued her with pride nor enervated her spirits. Ulrici observes that she stands above the evils of great wealth. She has no sense of aristocratic pride; she is not made blasé by her noble birth; but she is free, fresh, joyous, and pure in heart. "She is in the full bloom of life, a rare, beautiful and fragrant flower in a luxurious garden, where the sunbeams of love have just unfolded her into a most perfect blossom."

Hudson spoke of Portia's regal surroundings as though it were the proper soil for the cultivation of a mind such as hers. His descriptive language is beautiful: "Brought up amid the choicest riches and splendors earth can bestow; with the very regalities of nature and art around her, and with the selectest influences of creation continually raying in upon her; she is indeed 'a rich-souled creature', in whom the finest germs of womanhood have blossomed forth without a weed to check or a chill to blight their growth."

Cowden Clarke was not so much impressed with the cultiv-

ation of Portia's mind as with the meekness with which she bore her regal position. In her own domestic circle, she is not at all forward. Her speech everywhere is "un-vain". Clarke sums up her nobility thus: "She is the wellbred lady, — accustomed to command, to rank and station, and to dispose of her household, her wealth, her time, herself, as best seems to her; but she bears her faculties meekly, and is dignified, without pride or haughtiness."

Gervinus compares her nobility with that of Antonio. Just as he is beset with parasites, so she is surrounded on all sides with suitors. Antonio, too, it will be remembered, was free from any bad influence from his rich possessions, as in the case of Portia.

George Brandes touches upon the long tradition of stainless prosperity and happiness that must have surrounded her youth, so that she has been born and reared in perfect harmony with her high conditions of life.

BASSANIO

HIS PRODIGALITY — This trait of character which is so much emphasized by Shakspeare in the play is something that the commentators of the last century did not want to accept without some modifying statement in defense of Portia's lover. His prodigality, however, cannot be effaced altogether. It was, according to Skottowe the underlying cause of Bassanio's selfishness when he allowed his friend to risk his life for him. But our lover does not "dream away his life in love, utterly forgetful of honor", as the lover does in the Italian novel of Giovanni.

Bassanio's prodigal life is explained away by Elze. The riddle can only be solved by assuming that he has preserved a firm character in spite of his youthful extravagances. He has the 'grace of God', to use Launcelot's proverb, and every one around him, including Antonio himself, holds him in high esteem.

Gervinus evidently regards Bassanio as a profligate fellow in whom good qualities were latent. His extravagance as well as his ruined circumstances is undoubtedly shown on the day he sets forth for Belmont and gives a farewell feast. He seems like a man who makes friendships only for the sake of borrowing

money; and his love is directed toward the rich lady's fortune rather than toward the lady herself. But Antonio knew him better. He shows his manliness when he refuses to live with Portia three months before making his choice of the caskets.

JESSICA

1. HER FLIGHT — This incident introduces one of the most interesting problems of our play. The meaning of the flight as it is related to the other characters in the story or to the plot has been talked about by the commentators from the impressionistic point of view. Hazlitt, in his enthusiasm over the justice of Shylock's revenge, did not like Jessica because she deceived and robbed her father. Charles Knight, writing twenty-five years later, also finds fault with the Jewess, but this critic philosophizes on her character in the same way that he philosophized on Shylock. We know she has done wrong but the circumstances of her flight force us to side with her. Her higher and better nature is overwhelmed by the force of "conventional circumstances". "But when she has fled from him, robbed him, spent fourscore ducats in one night, given his turquoise for a monkey, and, finally, revealed his secrets, with an evasion of the ties that bound them which makes one's flesh creep, —

"When I was *with him*,"

we see the poor girl plunged into the most wretched contest between her duties and her pleasures by the force of external circumstances. We grant, then, to all these our compassion; for they commit injustice ignorantly, and through a force which they cannot withstand."

Cowden Clarke was not at all satisfied with Jessica's general behavior. In her flight she does not attract our sympathy. Elze, too, saw nothing but moral looseness in the girl's actions.

Elze represented Shylock as a deceived father who has lost his daughter on account of the waywardness of the Christian Lorenzo. In this respect he is reminded of the story of old Bra-

bantio, who makes Othello responsible for his child's flight. Elze observes further that Jessica's flight is the result of the lack of moral relationship between father and daughter.

Frederick Hawkins used the flight of Jessica as a way of excusing Shylock for his intent to kill the merchant at the trial-scene. Increased malignity resulted from the thought that Antonio may have assisted her to get away. So in the trial-scene we can easily assume that the Jew's reason has been shaken by the sudden flight of his daughter.

Gervinus tried hard to prevent any dislike for Jessica. The flight has no reflection on her character. She is ashamed of her father's selfish life and even against her own youthful modest nature she escapes from the cramped conditions of her life by donning boy's clothes and joining her father's enemies.

In Boas's opinion modern sentiment finds it more difficult than Elizabethan prejudice to condone her filial breach in the elopement with Lorenzo, and even if her flight be excused, the theft of her father's stones and ducats jars unpleasantly our preconceived ideas of the conduct proper to a heroine of romance.

2. HER PRACTICAL SENSE — This trait in Jessica's character was left unnoticed by the early writers on Shakspere's plays and instead she seems to have given them just the reverse impression. Her artlessness and affectionate temper, according to Drake, are the things about her which interest the reader. Such non-intellectual qualities of mind were bound to make a lasting impression on an age whose outlook on life was almost purely aesthetic. The strange experience of the beautiful Jewess; the mystery of a passionate love between a Christian and a Jewess; the picturesqueness of the flight, and the lovers in the garden-scene; these all attracted the poetic imagination of the romantic age.

But Jessica has in her nature something of her father's worldly shrewdness. Charles Knight noted some actions which indicate a cold, intellectual mind. She "robbed him (Shylock), spent fourscore ducats in one night, gave his turquoise for a

monkey, and, finally, revealed his secrets". But Knight made no special comment on this side of her life as he too was more impressed by the strange experience of youth and beauty.

Cowden Clarke does not speak definitely of Jessica's practical ability but his treatment of her character is almost wholly taken up with showing that she is unfeeling and has not a spark of softness in her nature. The robbing of her father was the reverse of what we should expect of a girl of her faith. The words she speaks to Lorenzo when she is throwing the jewels to him all agree with her "general want of sentiment and delicate feeling". The trading of her father's ring for a monkey is also denounced by Clarke. Shakspere meant her to be trifling. Her trifling conversation with the clown upon her conversion to Christianity is in keeping with her general character.

Elze and Gervinus disagree upon the character of the Jewess. The former took her as a practical minded maid who knew how to play her own game in life. She knows the value of money when she calls out: "Here, catch this casket; it is worth the pains. (II, vi, 33). She does not act like an ordinary Jewess. The denial of pleasures at home have given her a tendency for enjoyment which is given outlet in the merriment at Genoa after she flees. Gervinus on the other hand can see nothing but innocence in Jessica. He pictured her as an "ether-eal being" unacquainted with the ways of the world and the value of money. She has no mother and growing up in the society of a watchful but unsympathetic father and a country simpleton, Launcelot, her mind has remained naive and simple. This innocence is so dominant in her that she steals the ducats and Jewels from her father with no scruples of conscience.

Snider attributed the practical side of Jessica's nature to the working out of "the assertion of the Right of Choice against the Will of the Parent", as in the case of Portia. But the expression of her rebellion is more violent than Portia's. She "tramples without scruples upon all the commands and prejudices of a living father, and steals his money besides".

GRATIANO

HIS WIT — What sort of wit is Gratiano's? If the critics took this character for what he says, he might be regarded as a clown. But there is nothing regular or consistent about Gratiano's character. Hazlitt at the very beginning of the century indicated the range of opinions concerning him. Hazlitt spoke of him as the "jester of the piece," but at the same time noted the wisdom and philosophy contained in some of his longer speeches.

Birch regarded him little more than a clown who "extraxts his merriment from religion". The particular speech quoted by Birch to show Shakspeare's rebuke at religious people, is the piece of mockery where Gratiano puts on an air of meekness to show how well he can play a sober part:

Talk with respect and swear but now and then,
Wear prayer-books in me pocket, look demurely,
Nay more, when grace is saying, hood mine eyes
Thus with my hat and sigh and say Amen;
etc.

Quite different is Hudson's opinion of Gratiano's wit. Though this character is voluble, he cannot agree with Bassanio's remark that "he speaks an infinite deal of nothing more than any man in all Venice". United with his incessant talkativeness, Gratiano, thinks Hudson, "is a ramarkable instance of great strength and rectitude of mind". "Gratiano seems to us no less witty and sensible than talkative. He has indeed renounced the hope of getting the reputation of wisdom by never saying anything; and he wisely makes a merit of talking nonsense when, as is often the case, nonsense is the best sort of sense. He neither has nor affects any fellowship for faces of marble: seeks not the society of cast-iron gentlemen; and out of pure generosity, he is willing to incur the charge of folly, provided he can thereby add to the health and entertainment of his friends¹⁵."

Cowden Clarke was also reluctant to agree with Bassanio in his estimation of Gratiano. He does not think him an

¹⁵ *Lectures on Shakspeare*, p. 317.

intelligent fellow but one who is nevertheless useful in the society of men simply "by his own mercurial temperament and agreeable rattle". To Gratiano's credit is also his willingness to champion a friend in adversity with good words and deeds, "if not with the most sagacious counsel". He thinks Bassanio is not capable of censoring him because Gratiano is more lively in spirit. Toward Antonio, for instance, he first sympathizes; then he tries to rally him from his lowness of spirits. This excuses the talker from being selfishly boisterous.

NERISSA

HER CULTURE — Nerissa is more than a mere servant. Her strength of character is due to the whole-hearted confidence that Portia has in her. Joseph Hunter drew attention to the fact that she is not to be regarded as a waitingmaid in the modern sense of the term but as a lady who is nearly on an equal with Portia in birth and rank. He pointed out that it was customary in Shakespere's time for ladies of high rank to serve in such a capacity. As a person of good birth she is a suitable match for Gratiano.

Ulrici does not deal at length with the character of Nerissa. He sees a contrast between Portia's fate, bound as it is to the will of a deceased father, and that of Nerissa who voluntarily makes her own happiness dependent upon the fortunes of her mistress.

Cowden Clarke was not content with simply saying that the maid is a woman of high rank. He wonders what kind of a wife she will make for Gratiano. What Clarke surmised in this respect about Nerissa's "keeping her husband trotting," and about the good-natured Gratiano's spoiling his wife, is just some more hypothetical ramblings away from a real appreciation of Shaksperean characterization.

Gervinus saw in Nerissa a lady similar in nature to Portia. She has Portia's raillery and playfulness combined with real mental vigor.

CHAPTER IV

THE FALLACY OF THE ROMANTIC INTERPRETATION

The elements of characterization that have been reviewed in the last chapter should form the basis of understanding Shakspeare's handling of the persons in the play, as it is on such a groundwork that the dramatist could exercise his dramatic skill. Such a fundamental analysis as, for instance, Portia's love, intelligence, wit, and nobility, brings us within reach of Shakspeare's own workmanship in the matter of characterization. The romantic nineteenth century fell into the error, as we have noted, of making these elements so many points of departure for explaining, through the imagination, how Shakspeare meant the play to be understood. Very little attempt was made to interpret according to sixteenth century conventional methods of writing and producing plays; and, what they attributed to Shakspeare's purpose, really amounted to nothing more than their individual impressions. This fallacy can be brought out more clearly, perhaps, by reviewing the opinions of commentators on our play taken as a whole.

William Richardson began the new school of æsthetic criticism Richardson in his *Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of Some of Shakspeare's Dramatic Characters* (1774 and 1808). This work deals with the characters in a diffusing and moralizing manner. It was a natural product of the age that read Samuel Richardson's sentimental novels.

Unfortunately, Richardson was concerned only with tragedy and so did not say anything about *The Merchant of Venice*. From this time on, all writings on Shakspeare's plays reflected the romantic nature. Their æsthetic viewpoint at first had little depth, like Hazlitt's popular work on the characters in Shak-

sphere. But the aesthetic criticism soon took root and developed into a full discussion of dramatic technique. Before these researches had fructified, however, there was much foundering of ideas between impressionistic and philosophical views.

Richardson's long and somewhat dry introduction gives us the basis on which he studies characterization. The fluctuations of the human emotions is the element in the plays by which Shakspere has conveyed to us moral meanings. To Richardson, the chief end of poetry is morality. Though *The Merchant of Venice* is not discussed, his book helped to prepare the way for the philosophical opinions passed on Shylock by the later critics.

Hazlitt William Hazlitt acquitted himself excellently in observing the beauties and graces in Shakspere's works. The opinion of a certain writer, Francis Jeffrey, who reviewed Hazlitt's work in the *Edinburgh Review* the same year that it was published, describes the unsoundness of the work. Instead of telling us what he knows about Shakspere's characters, he explains "what he feels about them — and why he feels so — and thinks that all who profess to love poetry should feel likewise".

Mrs. Jameson Mrs. Jameson was the first writer to deal with the character of Portia at length. While Hazlitt had lost sight of everything else in the play because of his enthusiasm for Shylock, she declared that Portia is as finely drawn as the Jew. Her summary of Portia's character is that the heroine has "intellect kindled by a poetical imagination," and at the end of her discussion there is a detailed comparison between Portia and Camiola, in Massinger's *Maid of Honour*.

Brown C. A. Brown's broad view about the play was that Shakspere's purpose was to "alleviate the bitter persecutions not only toward the Jews, but toward all others". He placed the blame for the lack of toleration in the play on both Christian and Jew alike.

Drake Nathan Drake, one of the most learned critics of Shakspere, was interested more in the historical background of *The Merchant of Venice*, and seems to have depended largely on Francis Douce

His comments on the characters, though short, are philosophical in tone.

Joseph Hunter in his *New Illustrations* (1845) deals with the historical side of the play as well as with an aesthetic appreciation of the characters. He first pointed out the necessity of understanding the proud position of the city of Venice during Shakspeare's day through sixteenth century writers like Coryat and Moryson. An enlightening discussion followed on the probability that the lost play 'the Jew' spoken of by Gosson was the immediate source for the dramatist. The ballad called *The Northern Lord*, containing incidents similar to those in *The Merchant of Venice*, was analysed. His treatment of the characters was not full but he was definite in opinions on motives.

Charles Knight in his estimation of the play followed closely the opinions of Hermann Ulrici. He tried to modify the "system" which Ulrici accorded to Shakspeare's intention, though his own explanation of the poet's attitude toward life was not much different. "We cannot avoid expressing our opinion that, although Shakspeare might not have proposed to himself so systematic a display of the contest that is unremittingly going forward in the world between our conventional and natural beings, he did intend to represent the anomalies that have always existed between the circumstances by which human agents are surrounded and the higher motives by which they should act¹." As for *The Merchant of Venice*, this idea, Knight thought, "is the basis of the large toleration which belongs to this drama, amidst its seeming intolerance".

Knight's explanation of Shakspeare's meaning with regard to the circumstances which militated against Shylock, is fully as subjective as Ulrici's method of approaching the plays. "But the habitual contempt with which he is treated by men who in every other respect are gentle and goodhumored and benevolent is a proof to us that Shakspeare meant to represent the struggle that must inevitably ensue, in a condition of society

¹ *The Comedies, Histories, Tragedies and Poems of William Shakspeare*, Vol. II, p. 354.

where the innate sense of justice is deadened in the powerful by those hereditary prejudices which make cruelty virtue; and where the powerless, invested by accident with the means of revenge, say with Shylock, 'The villainy you teach me I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction²!' Reviewing Mrs. Inchbald's opinion on the character of Shylock, Knight seems to agree that the Jew was meant to be a detested person rather than a comic one. There is no doubt that Shakspere meant to move the audience to odium but this odium may have been heightened by the actor to please the popular appetite more than the author intended.

Ulrici Hermann Ulrici's *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art* was the most exhaustive work on Shakspere up to his time. He first outlined the life and times of the dramatist. His main interest was historical but long chapters are also devoted to aesthetic criticism. By trying to find the central idea of each play, the German critic falls into subjective interpretation. "The tragedy of Macbeth is evidently intended to represent the deep fall of human greatness." "The purpose of the piece (Hamlet) is to show how the self-made thoughts, hopes, intentions of man miss their mark, etc." Ulrici goes extremely far in ascribing such doctrines to Shakspere himself.

The critic first reviewed each character in *The Merchant of Venice*. Antonio is noble-hearted and melancholy; Bassanio is typical of the Italian gentleman; Portia is lovable and intellectual; Jessica is a child of nature, filled with oriental enthusiasm. His estimation of Shylock is elaborate: he is the image of Jewish character and epitomizes centuries of persecution against the race.

Ulrici then worked out an original explanation of the intricate plot of our play. The various interests, as those between Antonio and Shylock, Bassanio and Portia, etc. are blended harmoniously. This external union is made possible, however, by an internal ethical principle. The nature of this principle is revealed here and there throughout the play. The idea running

² *ibid.*

through the play, which discloses the meaning of the relations of the principal characters, rests upon the old juridical precept, *summum jus, summa injuria*. Shylock, though the law is on his side, falls into the highest injustice by adhering too closely to the letter of the law. The meaning of this precept is that law when carried to the extreme becomes the means of doing wrong. It is set forth in other parts of the play, as when the imposition of a father to choose a daughter's husband brings wrong upon Portia. She escapes it by a happy thought. Jessica's flight is legally a wrong also; yet no one blames her.

The purpose of W. J. Birch's work is to determine merely Birch by quotations from the plays what Shakspeare's religious beliefs were. In the preface he quotes Bulwer Lytton as saying that the hero in a play reflects certain qualities which are like the author's. If the same sentiments predominate in all his works, they must be part of the author's mind. The work is of importance to us only in several comments on the characters of *The Merchant of Venice*. Birch seems to have shared with Ulrici and Knight the idea that Shakspeare meant to express universal truths through the words and actions of his various characters.

H. N. Hudson, though he was, like Ulrici, prone to philoso- Hudson phize wherever a happy thought suggested to him some underlying meaning, made more use of conventional motives and actions of the characters in *The Merchant of Venice* by reference wherever possible to what was in the literary and social atmosphere of Shakspeare's day. On the other hand, he states in the preface of his work, *Lectures on Shakspeare*, his purpose of bringing out in his lectures the things in the play that instruct us in the "practical aims and interests of life".

C. C. Clarke agreed with Victor Hugo that Shakspeare solely Clarke desired that forgiveness of injuries should be practiced between Jew and Christian. Though his book, *Shakespeare-Characters*, is a masterpiece of literature and very readable, it lacks scholarship. At the very beginning of his discussion on *The Merchant of Venice*, Clarke placed himself among that group of critics

who believe that Shakspeare lived beyond his age as a "moral and social philosopher". *The Merchant of Venice*, Clarke believed, is the best proof of this. He assumed that Shakspeare was conscious of the cruelty done by the Christians to the Jews. He was familiar with the story of Hugh of Lincoln and with the murder of the Christian babe in Chaucer's story of the Nun's tale, and felt that an original wrong could never be corrected by such violent means. The attitude of mind which Shakspeare took in writing *The Merchant of Venice* was based on the principle that those who aim at reforming the masses must make a show at following them. "Upon this, his grand principle, therefore, it appears that the poet, in delineating the character and conduct of Shylock, as well as of his Christian opponents, has, with his large wisdom, preached a homily upon injustice to each sect and denomination of religionists, with a force and perspicuity of argument, as well as knowledge of human nature in its melancholy prejudices, that, to me, as I reflect upon his impartiality, his honest dispensation of justice, as displayed in this drama, places him centuries in advance of his age, and the production itself among the greatest efforts of human genius³." Clarke believed that so philosophical is the appeal in *The Merchant of Venice* that the play has actually been instrumental in breaking down the barriers of intolerance.

Hawkins Frederick Hawkins was the first to point out the probable coincident of the production of *The Merchant of Venice* and the condemnation of Dr. Lopez in 1594. After reviewing the persecution of the Jews in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, Hawkins opens up his thesis by declaring that Shakspeare intended *The Merchant of Venice* as a plea for toleration toward the Jew, although he makes some concessions to the popular bitterness against the Jew.

The events in the play that have usually been given as proof that Shakspeare was hostile to the Jews are three in number: the enormity of the crime which Shylock contemplates against his enemies; he is defeated by his own weapons; and at the

³ *Shakespeare-Characters*, p. 390.

end he is required to embrace Christianity. In opposition to this adverse view toward Shylock, Hawkins contends that by studying the character carefully a certain amount of sympathy is aroused. The humanizing element can be felt if one allows himself to read between the lines. Shakspeare "saw the Jews, and so seeing them wrote *The Merchant of Venice* in order to exhibit one of their number at a disadvantage as a direct result of the unreasoning prejudice against them. He more than counteracted with one hand what he seemed to do with the other. In availing himself of the greatest madness of his time he sought to appease it. His play might have been regarded as an attack upon the Jews, but in reality it defended them." Moreover, Shakspeare spared no pains to dignify the character of Shylock. His religious aristocracy for his tribe and ancient law, the touches of humanity which gleams from his avarice, his attachment to his dead wife and to his daughter, and the wealth of ideas revealed in his speeches, all show us the finest side of his nature. The sourness of his nature, which vitiated all his fine parts, is excusable on the grounds of social circumstances. Public scorn almost subdued his originally noble character.

Hawkins believed that Shakspeare concentrated attention on the oppressed Jew rather than on the brighter elements. He agrees with Hazlitt that the company around Antonio are hypocrites in their virtues, and are out-argued by Shylock in every verbal combat. The article in *The Theatre* (volume II) is concluded by a brief sketch of the handling of Shylock on the stage, tracing it through the Lansdown version of 1701 and Macklin's conception of the character. Other stage Jews of the latter half of the eighteenth century are mentioned. In all of these the Jew is a butt or buffoon.

This discussion, propounded by Hawkins with regard to Shakspeare's intentions, was the occasion for immediate objection from many famous scholars. In the December number 1879, Thomas Martin, F. J. Furnivall, Frank Marshall, James Spedding, Israel Davis, and David Anderson in brief notes all disagreed with Hawkins' conclusion, that *The Merchant of Venice*

was written as a plea for toleration. Martin asserted that no one in the play urges toleration. Davis and Marshall both conceded that Shakspere made Shylock a human being. Furnival while objecting to the idea that *The Merchant of Venice* was doctrinal, conceded that some things in the play show that the humanity of Christians and Jews is the same. Spedding maintained that Shylock's punishment was lighter than it ought to have been. Anderson brought out the fact that the scarcity of Jews in England would argue against Shakspere's pleading for the Jews.

Snider D. J. Snider's *System of Shakespeare's Drama* is an elaborate arrangement of the dramas according to their internal analysis. The general classification depends on the essential characteristic of the plays, and this, as far as the comedies are concerned, is a "collision mediated by the instrumentalities" of the real or ideal world. If the mediation is accomplished through the introduction of the ideal world, for instance by the outlaw life in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the play should be classified as ideal. On the other hand, when a figure in the play solves the difficulty, the play belongs to the "real" group. All the comedies can be thus arranged under these two headings.

In this system *The Merchant of Venice* falls under the head of the real comedies because Portia, who was the indirect cause of Antonio's falling into the hands of the Jew, is the mediation by which Antonio is released. "The general movement of the play, therefore, lies in the conflict between the right of property and the existence of the Individual, and in the mediation of this conflict through the Family, which owes its origin, in the present case to that same individual whom it rescues. That is, the Family, represented by Portia, the wife, returns and saves the man who aided, by his friendship and generosity, to bring it into being. All the characters of the play, though possessing peculiarities of their own, must be seen in their relation to this fundamental theme of the work⁴."

Gervinus G. G. Gervinus is generally ranked as inferior to Ulrici. The part of his *Commentaries* devoted to the analysis of char-

⁴ *System of Shakespeare's Dramas*, p. 305.

acterization is commonplace. He follows the current views and in large part lacks originality. The idea stressed by this critic with regard to *The Merchant of Venice* is that the story is based on the principle of the relation of man to property. Antonio, Portia, and Bassanio are at ease in life amid wealth, while Shylock is grasping amid his riches. Deeds and characters are better than rank and pretentious show.

In *William Shakspeare*, George Brandes explains the relation of each play to the growth of the dramatist's mind. He points out many things in *The Merchant of Venice* that show progressive development in this growth. For instance, the rich music and harmony in the play symbolises the inward wealth of Shakspeare's mind at this period. Brandes

The stage is always a good reflex of popular feelings. The nineteenth century produced many noteworthy Shakspearean actors, but the line of famous Shylocks includes only a few of these. The characterizations of the Jew by George F. Cooke, Edmund Kean, Charles Kean, G. V. Brooke, Henry Irving, and Edwin Booth, would hardly be recognizable if compared with one another. The differences in stage interpretation show clearly how independent of the dramatist a great actor can be. The trend of interpretation among these six "Shylocks" corresponds to the general trend of criticism. Sympathy for the Jew grew with each histrionic interpretation until in the hands of Irving and Booth, Shylock became nothing less than a tragic hero. Edmund Kean, known as the most famous of all Shylocks, was the first to make the figure well-poised in mind, healthy in body, and human in every respect. In his sympathetic attitude, he broke away from the diabolical figure worked before his time by Macklin. The Stage

CHAPTER V

THE RETURN TO SHAKSPERE: THE HISTORICAL REALISTS

What the critics and general commentators have had to say on the different phases of characterization gives the reader an attitude toward Shakspeare which would hardly suit a sixteenth century dramatist. Accustomed in their age to a different method of dramatic art, it was natural for these interpreters to entertain an incomplete appreciation of the plays. Starting out with the same dominant impressions of the characters, they have all involved themselves in psychological "detours" which are quite foreign to Shakspeare's art. Subjective interpretation, which has for the most part guided the critics, has led each to a different point of view. The impression got from their interpretation is that Shakspeare's way of thinking was like that of a poet or philosopher, rather than that of a dramatist. By going back to the conventions prevalent in Shakspeare's day, we can arrive at a better understanding of the dramatist's own intention with regard to the problems in characterization which have just been studied. Before taking up each character in detail the advocates of the strictly historical school will be mentioned here, and then by way of introduction to what I have to say about the characters a word will be said about the literary background of *The Merchant of Venice*.

The necessity of studying Shakspeare from a strictly historical point of view is emphasized by E. E. Stoll who has published several excellent treatises on character problems¹. In these he sets forth the historical method of interpreting Shakspeare. This method is based in large part on a recognition of the fact that Shakspeare's art is far more primitive and naive than

¹ See bibliography.

ours. The proper approach to the study of Shakspeare must be made through the conventions and devices used before and during his dramatic career. The following facts, then, must be kept in mind to obtain a right appreciation of his art:

1. The primitiveness of dramatic art in Shakspeare's day.
2. Shakspeare's carelessness and lack of artistic conscience are apparent everywhere.
3. Shakspeare derives his plots from old stories but his genius made his characters more human; thus causing incongruities between plot and characterization.

Agreeing with Stoll in the main, L. L. Schücking has laid down the dramatic principles for a more scientific study of the plays². The Elizabethan times presents certain peculiarities, which indicate that the dramatist was allowed less free play to his individuality than enjoyed by writers of later centuries. In the choice of plot he was governed by a keen competition to satisfy the public. There was a franker endeavor to yield to public demand than there is to-day. There was very little creative work done in the modern sense of the term. "We may take it for granted," says Schücking, "that our modern demand, that the inspiration of the artist's work must be looked for in his own innermost experience, was almost unknown in the Elizabethan era³." Collaboration, which was indulged in to a great extent, not only affected the technique of the drama but also cramped individual work. Although proof of collaboration in the case of Shakspeare can be given to any positive extent only in *Henry VIII* and *Titus Andronicus*, his later works show the effects quite often of remodeling other works and working on the devices of others. As to the whole mass of literature prior to Shakspeare, the greater part of it is anonymous. Most of the mystery plays are without authorship. Many authors like Peele, Greene, Kyd, and Marlove, who drifted away from university life, wrote anonymous plays. The neglect of Kyd to attach

² *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays.*

³ *ibid.*, p. 9.

his name to his plays has caused much labor to prove his authorship to *The Spanish Tragedy*. Such carelessness on the part of authors indicates how close the author was to his public for whom he slaved and Shakspeare was not free to stand apart from its sway. The fact that many of his plays were not printed shows that he, like the anonymous writers, did not attach much importance to his works. Some individualism did show itself in Shakspeare's immediate predecessors, especially in Christopher Marlowe. But to assume that Marlowe took his eye away from the audience when he conceived the great character of Faust, is wrong. Though the "Titan" Faust is the embodiment of Marlowe's own aspiring soul, the horrors in the play reflect the taste of the audience.

Older dramatic forms appear in Shakspeare's works. *Antony and Cleopatra* is an example in which the number of scenes are unusually large. The excessive amount of bloodshed after the manner of the old Senecan plays, is found in all the great tragedies of Shakspeare. The plucking out of Gloster's eyes in *King Lear* is especially atrocious. Shakspeare's use of the clown is another sign of his striving after popularity by employing an old popular form. Most of the scenes where the clown holds the stage are irrelevant and serve only to relieve the serious theme of the play.

In pleading for a literal interpretation because of sixteenth century conditions, Schücking in the bulk of his work emphasizes the inconsistencies and improbabilities which abound in Shakspeare and which need historical explanation, especially those which arise between character and action. This lack of realism has not been overlooked by other critics, but they seem to think that these problems as they appear to us were equally evident to Shakspeare and his audience.

The literary atmosphere of the sixteenth century was a condition that strongly influenced theatrical composition. Romantic literature carried on and popularized the traditions of mediæval romance. Though plays were abundantly produced during Queen Elizabeth's time, they were not nearly so popular as

extravagant tales and lyric poetry of the sensuous sort. The type which served more than any other for source material to the dramatists was the romantic novel. These novels were from Italian and Spanish sources. In all the various forms traces of realism are seen, but the romantic atmosphere predominates everywhere. The absurdly adventurous is the theme one constantly meets with. The influence of all this highly romantic literature left the dramatist limited in his work by a vast amount of conventional forms. A great part of his work was to build up his play by means of this conventional material. The sentimental friendships between men; ideal lovers who are young and pure; a rich and noble lady who by her wit finds a way out of difficulty; a usurer who is hated and ridiculed by Christians; the girl dressed in boy's clothes and fleeing with her lover, are some of the conventions used in *The Merchant of Venice*, that were very common in the literature of the day. The use of these old conventions, which were taken for granted by the audience, made the details of the work of Shakspeare and his contemporaries less important than the rounding out of the play in its entirety scene by scene.

The determining factor in every phase of Elizabethan drama was the audience. The relations between the acting companies and the audience were very intimate. The actors were of the common people and no doubt shared a personal acquaintance with them. The stage which jutted out into the audience brought the actor closer to the people. It is generally believed that under such conditions the actors could feel at liberty to address the audience directly and could give explanatory matter (after the manner of the "aside") concerning the story which would be out of place on our stage.

Some information regarding the literary background of *The Merchant of Venice* can hardly be dispensed with here, as a discussion of sources is the best approach to the study of characterization that is to follow. The serious story of the play is the bond-story. It is based on an old legend of oriental origin occurring in many Eastern and European languages but made

popular in Europe by its inclusion in a collection of stories entitled *Il Pecorone* by Ser. Giovanni Fiorentio. The chief points of resemblance between it and *The Merchant of Venice* are as follows: The main scene is laid in Venice; the hero, Ansaldo, finances his friend with money borrowed from a Jew on the condition that he forfeit a pound of flesh in default of payment; the lady who is courted lives at Belmonte; disguised as a lawyer she handles the case at court and outwits the Jew, after first seeming to yield to the Jew's demands; instead of money at the end of the trial she takes the ring from her unknowing lover; she teases her husband at the end, finally returning the ring; the waiting-maid and the husband's friend are mated.

Other stories having a pound of flesh as the penalty for non-payment are mentioned by Francis Douce⁴: Gladwin's *Persian Moonshee*, story 13; a story in the *British Magazine* for 1800, p. 159; in Tyron, *Recueil de plusieurs plaisantes nouvelles*, Anvers, 1590, a Christian borrows 500 ducats from a Jew at Constantinople, on condition of paying two ounces of flesh for usury. The matter is brought before the Emperor Solymann, who gives the Jew a razor with the admonition not to cut off more or less than the required two ounces on pain of death. The Jew yields. The same story according to Douce, occurs in *Roger Bontemps en belle humeur; Tresor des recreations*, Douay, 1625, p. 27; *Doctae nugae Gaudensii jocosæ*, 1713, p. 23; *Courier facétieux*, Lyon, 1650, p. 109; *Chasse ennuy*, Paris, 1645, p. 49; *Corrozet's Divers propos memorables*, 1557, p. 77 (translated into English in 1602 under the title *Memorable conceits of divers noble and famous personages of Christendome*); *Apophthegmes, ou la recreation de la jeunesse*, p. 155; Gracian's *Hero* (see Steevens' *Shakspeare*); *Astraepho*, 1580, substitutes an eye to be pulled out instead of the pound of flesh; *Gernutus, the Jew of Venice*⁵, a ballad in Percy's *Reliques*. *Dolopothos*

⁴ *Illustrations of Shakspeare*, p. 171.

⁵ The likenesses are: (1) The forfeiture is taken at first as a joke. (2) Use of the word *bond*. (3) Debtor's ships are all at sea. (4) Sharpening

(ed. Oeterley, pp. 57—61) has been pointed out⁶ as well as *The Northern Lord*⁷. Some passages in the trial-scene seem to have been taken from Silvain's *Orator*, 1596, declamation 95. The pound-of-flesh story is touched upon in the *Leti* story in Percy's *Reliques*. The first English version of the story is found in the thirteenth century translation of *Cursor Mundi*.

But more important than these minor sources is a *Gesta Romanorum* in English, to which the play, in the opinion of some, "stands immediately indebted". This work is remarkable in containing also in a separate place the incident of the caskets. The *Gesta Romanorum*, Ch. 99, was probably Shakspeare's source for the caskets story, but *Il Pecorone* stands closer in detail to *The Merchant of Venice* for the bond-story. The story of the caskets first occurs in the Mediaeval romance *Barlaam and Josaphat*, written in Greek by Joannes Damascenus, about 800. In Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, a king uses caskets to point a moral.

The Lorenzo-Jessica story owes something, of course, to the experiences of Abigail in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. In this drama, the Jewess is for a time faithful to her avaricious father; falls in love with a Christian; and finally deserts her father. Dunlop has traced the origin of this story to the fourteenth tale of Massuccio di Salerno (1470). Here we have the elopement of a young lady, whose father, a miser, kept her shut up; the robbery of her father's jewels; and the grief of the miser, which is divided between his daughter and his ducats.

The strong literary tradition of these three stories assures us that they were well known to the public of Shakspeare's day. But the question arises whether these separate stories were combined in an early play which underwent revision at the hands of Shakspeare. Douce, Steevens, Skottowe, Knight, and others

of the knife. (5) Jew's intention to cut off flesh from part of body which must lead to debtor's death.

⁶ W. A. Clouston, who says it was written in the early part of the 13th century. (*The Academy*, June 18, 1887.)

⁷ See Hunter's summary: *Illustrations*, vol. I. p. 302.

have given their opinion that Gosson's *Jew*⁸ was the dramatist's immediate source. Their opinion is very plausibly based on Gosson's statement that these two elements occurred in the play which he saw. One opinion, at least, is that "the relation of *The Merchant of Venice* to *The Jew* was probably much the same as the relation of *King Lear* to the old tragedy of *King Leir and his Three Daughters*⁹".

Many of the conventional ideas already worked over in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* appear again in *The Merchant of Venice*. One may say that the former play is nothing more than a mass of effective devices, showing the author's conservative care in utilizing only those materials in the playwright's workshop that were pleasing to the audience. The loving friendship between men; the faithfulness of Valentino; the deception of Proteus; the generosity of Sylvia; the steadfastness of Julia; the attiring of a lady in male clothing; the quibbling of Speed; the vulgarity of Lance; are all exaggerated that they may meet the romantic feelings of the audience. Characterization is narrowed down to only one or two qualities. Faithfulness is a real element in human nature but when it is emphasized in Valentino to such a degree of mawkishness that he gives his true love to his false friend, with the words: "All that was mine in Silvia I give thee" (V, iv), it was done to please an audience that had strong likings for what is romantic. The same romantic friendship existed between Antonio and Bassanio. Bassanio, too, is the extreme type of romantic lover. Launcelot, another study of the awkward Lance, has also some of the quibbling of Speed in him. Portia and Nerissa correspond to the former pair of capable women, Julia and Lucetta. As for Shylock, though not previously treated by Shakspere, his type is found everywhere in the literature of the sixteenth century, especially in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* under the name, Barabas. In our detailed discussion of the characters, Antonio will be dealt with first.

⁸ Nothing is known of this play outside of its mention by Stephen Gosson in his *Schoole of Abuse*.

⁹ Verity, *The Merchant of Venice*, p. xvii.

ANTONIO

Sadness I have already reviewed what the critics have to say on the merchant's sadness. One example here will recall the subjective way in which this outstanding trait has been treated. Elze would make Antonio a weakling who has resigned himself to his fate and who has willingly sacrificed everything for his friend. "The fact is" continues Elze, "that wealth has blunted his feelings, has satiated and made him effeminate; fulfilment, where it has not preceded, has immediately followed all his desires; what is there left for him to desire? Besides, he has no family for whose future he would have to provide, and in whose success he could take delight."

Antonio speaks of sadness making him a want-wit (I, i, 6). This is apparently a foreshadowing of his foolish act in making a bond with a Jew. The unusually long and impressive speech (I, i, 23 ff) by Salanio about the losing of the ships as the probable cause of Antonio's sadness, emphasizes this fact on the audience and prepares him for what actually happens. But we must believe Antonio's words when he says: "Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad." The sadness of Antonio, therefore, is simply a dramatic foreshadowing serving to prepare the audience for the misfortunes that are to come. It is left unmotivated, just as a foreboding or prophecy of evil would be. It does no good to look to minor causes in the story for the "sadness", as for example, Antonio's prospect of losing his friend Bassanio. If this were the case, Shakspeare would have taken occasion to tell us plainly as is his custom. This occasion could have been easily allowed in the passage:

Ant.: Well; tell me now what lady is the same
To whom you swore a secret pilgrimage,
That you to-day promised to tell me of?
(I, i, 119—21)

The knowledge of Bassanio's difficulties as indicated in lines, I, i, 122—23, is not a plausible reason for Antonio's sadness when we know the love that exists between the friends. His "disabled estate" was not troubling the romantic Bassanio, and

Antonio's riches are at the disposal of Bassanio. The first expression of Antonio, "I know not why I am so sad" is meant by Shakspeare to settle the search for the merchant's sadness. Shakspeare is in the habit of repeating details which are important and this idea is emphasized again by Antonio after the characters have made guesses as to the cause:

Ant.: I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano;
A stage where every man must play a part,
And mine a sad one. (I, i, 77—9).

Here we have a definite statement that Antonio's part in the present play is to be a sad one. In other words, Shakspeare is giving the audience some advance information. Antonio is to be the tragic figure in the play.

If "sad" means "grave" the passage still clearly indicates that Antonio's disposition is such as to suit the conventionality of his part, as an unfortunate victim of Jewish cunning. Details of character, therefore, are intentionally suppressed to give room for Shakspeare's sense of scenic effect. The guessing of the other characters in the play that Antonio's sadness is due to business, love, or sickness, is frankly denied by Antonio and it is all meant to whip up our curiosity. The mystery which makes the scene unreal also makes it stimulating to the imagination. As the keynote scene of the play, we should expect it to be so.

The hyperbolical language and exaggerated comparisons in the following speech are rhetorical and unrealistic:

Ant.: You may as well go and stand upon the beach,
And bid the main flood bate his usual height;
You may as well use question with the wolf,
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb;
You may as well forbid the mountain pines
To wag their high tops and to make no noise,
When they are fretted with the gusts of heaven, etc.
(IV, i, 71—80)

But they are suitable enough for Antonio's part as a tragic hero. The speech moves in us a feeling of sympathy for Antonio. The following passage also shows us the helpless feeling of Antonio before his adversary, and his love for his friend, Bassanio:

Ant.: But little I am arm'd and well prepared.
Give me your hand, Bassanio: fare you well!
Grieve not that I am fallen to this for you;
For herein Fortune shows herself more kind
Than is her custom: it is still her use
To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,
To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow
An age of poverty; from which lingering penance
Of such misery doth she cut me off.
Etc. (IV, i, 262 ff).

Another speech in which we get the tone of high tragedy is the following:

Ant.: I am a tainted wether of the flock
Meetest for death: the weakest kind of fruit
Drops earliest to the ground; so let me:
You cannot better be employed, Bassanio,
Than to live still, and write mine epitaph.
(IV, i, 114—19)

The three passages above quoted represent the merchant as a tragic figure. The language, though artificial in tone, has the dramatic effect of drawing the sympathy of the audience. The practice of Shakspeare in this case of repeatedly reminding the audience of Antonio's essential melancholy nature, is a sixteenth century convention. The practice is often taken to a point of morbid fantasy, as in the speech where Antonio asks Bassanio to live on that he may write his epitaph. If we think of Shakspeare as a romanticist, these difficulties of realism and figurative language at once disappear, for the romantic mind loves to dwell on the unusual and strange in human action. Otherwise one fails to appreciate the meaning of Antonio's character.

But a serious objection has been raised by Schücking. The sadness of Antonio, which is so plainly emphasized by Shakspeare throughout the play, has no direct bearing on the principal action of the story. This violates a cardinal principle of the drama which Shakspeare everywhere else observes¹⁰. H. Grierson has pointed out two instances which indicate that the sadness is not habitual¹¹. Antonio says: "That I have so much ado to know myself." (I, i, 7). Gratiano remarks to Antonio: "You are marvellously changed." (I, i, 76). These statements make it clear that Antonio's sadness does not belong to his *character* but to his *part* as a tragic hero. He is sad because the tragic events which are to come have already cast their shadow over him. His sadness belongs to the *plot* of the play. He is a victim of circumstances, and his passive contemplative mood reflects the adversities which he is about to undergo. Implicit is the contrast with his active spirit in the days of his prosperity, a spirit which finds expression (and coarse expression) in his treatment of the Jew (I, iii, 119 ff.). Antonio's sadness, therefore, is only temporary in accordance with the convention of the day, except that—and this is the important point to note—it is made to extend over the time of the entire play for the purposes of plot manipulation. Thus the principle as quoted from Schücking is not violated as the sadness has an intimate connection with the action of the story.

Friendship. From the context of the play, it was Shakspeare's intention that we should understand the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio to be ideally close. The statements that are made concerning this relation are put in the mouths of characters whom the reader must believe. In the first scene of the play, Salarino says, when Antonio enters:

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 171. The principle as given by Schücking is: „It is part of the principle of the drama that on the one hand the characters must not possess any conspicuous quality that does not influence the action, and on the other hand, the action must not depend on qualities which do not appear in the course of the drama.“

¹¹ *Contemporary Review*, 120. p. 667.

"I would have stayed till I had made you merry,
If *worthier friends* had not prevented me."

Bassanio says:

"To you, Antonio,

I owe the most, in money and in love"; (I, i, 130—1)
and Antonio addresses his friend, "good Bassanio", "sweet Bassanio". Antonio shows the generosity of an ideal friend. He instructs Bassanio to seek out someone who will lend the money.

"and I no question make,

To have it of my trust or for my sake." (I, i, 185)
Salanio who is apt to exaggerate somewhat but whose sentiments we, nevertheless, have no reason to doubt, says: "I think he only loves the world for him." When he learns of Antonio's distress, Bassanio declares him:

"The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,
The best-conditioned and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies; (III, ii, 287—90)

At the Trial-Scene, Bassanio places his love above his life:

"But life itself, my wife, and all the world,
Are not with me esteemed above thy life;
I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all
Here to this devil, to deliver you.

(IV, i, 282—5)

For Shakspeare and his audience, the traditional convention of displaying exaggerated moods on the stage dispelled from their minds any sense of the lack of realism. The exaggerated love between these two men, so often forced upon us throughout the play, is only one of numerous similar examples to be found in Renaissance literature. Shakspeare used the same device in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In *Twelfth Night*, some of the details of a romantic friendship parallel those in our play. The loyal friend is also named Antonio. He is a shipman, which reminds us of Bassanio's friend who is so

closely associated with the sea. He risks his life for his friend, Sebastian, as our Antonio does:

"The gentleness of all the gods go with thee!
I have many enemies in Orsino's court,
Else would I very shortly see thee there.
But come what may, I do adore thee so,
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.
(*Twelfth Night*, II, ii, 41—45)

In the *Il Pecorone* story, Ansaldo and Gianetto dear friends, the latter standing in the relationship of an adopted son. A survival of this connection between friends in the original story, is found in *The Merchant of Venice*, in the phrase spoken by Salanio: "your most noble kinsman." This phrase may very well have been taken over from an earlier play.

Nobility and honesty. Closely connected with Antonio's generosity and friendship is the nobleness of his character. Nothing in the story seems to mar this picture. Even the intelligence to see the deeper side of Shylock's motives is denied to him in order to uphold the purity of his character. We are told frankly what his character is. He is called "royal merchant" and he embodies the "ancient Roman honor". We must accept these statements as descriptive of what Shakspere intended him to be. The purity of his character did not strike Shakspere's audience as strange. There is a description of what the character of a merchant should be in *The Good and the Badde*¹² written by Nicholas Breton, in 1616. The description of "A Worthy Merchant", I have discovered, exactly fits the character of Antonio. It no doubt expresses what the ideal merchant was regarded in Renaissance literature. It begins by declaring that "a worthy merchant is the heire of adventure, whose hopes being *much upon the winde*. Upon wooden horses he rides through the world and in a merry gale, makes a path through the seas." He is "royall in his expenses", "the soldier's friend". He is "the exercise of the Exchange, the honor of

¹² See Grosart's edition.

credit, the observation of time and the understanding of thrift". His "wealth is his good name"; he is "neat in apparall, modest in demeanure, dainty in dyet, and civill in his carriago. In summe, he is the pillar of a city, the enricher of a country, the furnisher of a Couurt and the worthy servant of a King." Antonio's life and character in *The Merchant of Venice* is wholly in keeping with this description.

The following speech by Antonio has puzzled many critics:

Ant.: I am as like to call thee so again,
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
As to thy friends—for when did friendship take
A breed for barren metal of his friend? —
(I, iii, 119—123)

Should we take this remark to be the utterance of a "bigot" as Birch would have us believe? Or should we accept Knight's interpretation that by thus making the hate mutual Shakspeare meant to teach us a lesson in charity? We have seen that the statements of everyone in the play except Shylock praise the merchant's character. Nothing is said to imply the contrary. The remark therefore should be regarded as fitting to his honor. Since the general animosity of Christians towards the Jews is considered as part of the religion of the sixteenth century, such an outburst of wrath as that of Antonio's against usury must be regarded as creditable to the speaker, rather than as detracting from his good name.

But one action by Antonio might be regarded as inconsistent with his character. After the defeat of Shylock, he disposes of half of the Jew's money by saying: "The other half in use." Antonio's personal reason for hating Shylock is the latter's practice of lending money at interest. Nothing is clearer in Antonio's character than his opposition to "usance". Shakspeare's audience thoroughly sympathized with Antonio in this respect. How inconsistent it is, then, to hear Antonio proposing to put Shylock's money at interest for either his

benefit or the benefit of Lorenzo and Jessica¹³. Even if he meant to put the money at interest for the latter, it is somewhat opposed to the sentiment of Antonio, expressed in I, iii, 67. One critic, anonymous¹⁴, has already pointed out this inconsistency between the lending of money and Antonio's generosity. The rest of the passage beginning with the line in question (383—388) is very vague in meaning and should be considered a crude passage taken over from an earlier piece.

SHYLOCK

Attitude toward Antonio. There has been much disagreement as to Shylock's exact motive against Antonio. At the beginning of the play there is a soliloquy by Shylock in which several motives are stated:

"I hate him for he is a Christian
 But for that in low simplicity
 He lends out money gratis and brings down
 The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
 If I can catch him once upon the hip,
 I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him,
 He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,
 Even there where merchants most do congregate,
 On me, my bargains and my well-won thrift,
 Which he calls interest." (I, iii, 39—48.)

We have already seen that many critics have selected one or another reason from this passage and, reading between the lines, built up a defense for the Jew. This speech occurs in the midst of the negotiations for the loan. It is here that we should find an indication of Shylock's motive against Antonio. "I hate him

¹³ There has been some question as to the meaning of this passage. Johnson observes that Antonio desires not the property but the use or produce only of half and that, only, for the Jew's life. Ritson says the money is to remain at interest in Antonio's hands, and Shylock is to enjoy the produce of it. Mason thinks it means that the interest is to be used by Antonio.

¹⁴ See Furness, *op. cit.*, p. 228, note.

for he is a Christian," is an expression of lifelong hatred against the Christians. This is supported by historical facts concerning the racial animosity between Jew and Christian in the sixteenth century. "But more he lends out money gratis," clearly shows a personal hatred toward Antonio. This personal hatred was of long standing because he says so: "ancient grudge I bear him." But it is plainly stated also by Shylock that both the racial animosity and the personal hatred is returned by Antonio.

"He hates our sacred nation; and he rails,
Even there where merchants most do congregate,
On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift."

Under the circumstances we might distrust this last accusation against Antonio but later on we see that Antonio shares all the animosity toward the Jew that the other characters have. This is seen in I, iii, 120—125. The hate between Antonio and Shylock is mutual. Lest we should forget the personal hatred between the two, Antonio says later, in a situation where he can say nothing but the truth:

his reason well I know:

I oft delivered from his forfeitures
Many that have at times made moan to me;
Therefore he hates me. (III, iii, 19—24.)

The question arises at this point: Where, then, does Shylock show himself to be the villain? Stoll considers the whole soliloquy as branding Shylock as a villain¹⁵, but there is only one statement in it that points clearly to a villainous mind:

"If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat — —"

The rest of the soliloquy expresses mutual hate. Shylock's accusation against Antonio is, as I have stated above, verified by Antonio's words at the Trial-Scene. Creizenach, pointing out the personal hatred between the two men, thinks that the villainous intent of Shylock is not felt as unworthy until as late

¹⁵ „Shylock“, *Journal of English and German Philology*, Vol. 10, p. 241.

in the play as Antonio's confession in the Trial-Scene of delivering many from the Jew's clutches (above quoted)¹⁶). The audience, knowing the general hostility of Jew and Christian, accepted the mutual hate as a matter of course, but when Shylock hisses out, "If I can catch him once upon the hip," they know what violence is in the Jew's mind. From this moment on in the play, the audience is constantly reminded "by the comments of the good characters," as Stoll explains it, that the Jew is a villain: "Lest the Jew should make too favorable an impression by his Scripture protestations, Antonio observes that the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose; lest the Jew's motive in foregoing interest, for once in his life, should seem like the kindness Antonio takes it to be, Bassanio avows that he likes not fair terms and a villain's mind; and once the Jew has caught the Christian on the hip, every one, from Gaoler to Duke, has words of horror for him and of compassion for his victim¹⁷."

The expressions of Shylock in the play which tell us definitely of his intellect, can be accounted for in large part by the occurrence of similar passages in the literature of the times. The character of the Jew's mind is to a great extent built up on expressions from Barabas in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. Hazlitt's impression is that the fierceness of his revenge sharpens his faculties, while Skottow thinks his cruel mind is dignified by his intellectual vigor. Ulrici is reminded of the grand biblical figures of Moses and David. Hudson undervalues his mental strength, by assigning it to mere stubbornness. Other critics have similar impressionistic views. The conventional way of representing a Jew in literature is clearly reflected in the picture of Shylock. Shylock's keen knowledge of business affairs is seen a moment after his first appearance on the stage:

"Yet his means are in supposition: he hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies; I understand, moreover, upon the Rialto, he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for England, — and other ventures he hath, squandered abroad."

(I, iii, 17—21.)

¹⁶ *Jahr.*, LI, p. 177.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.* p. 240.

This kind of speech was well known to the audience as it is used by Marlowe in the *Jew of Malta*, (also at the beginning of the play)¹⁸. The citing of Scripture is another distinct Jewish trait which occurs in Marlowe's play. Not only the passage about Jacob but Antonio's remark as well: "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose," are borrowed from the *Jew of Malta*¹⁹. The whole passage about Jacob must have been put in merely for its stock ideas and phrases, already familiar to the audience. The same ideas are in Riche's *Honesty of the Age*, where the whole dialogue is also concluded with the remark: "The usurer has learned of the devil to allege the Holy Scriptures," (see *Percy Society*, p. 60).

Stoll has shown by a study of the arrangement of matter in the play that the figure of Shylock reacted ludicrously on the audience in Shakspeare's day. His argument is based mainly on Salanio's report of Shylock's outcries about his daughter and his ducats. The reporting of the affair gives Salanio an opportunity to make it all a matter of mirth²⁰. This comic attitude which is voiced by Bassanio's company throughout the play, represents the general effect of Shylock on the audience and therefore it must have been Shakspeare's intention to make him a comic figure. The serious side of Shylock's character is reflected in the two things which give him a grave intellectual cast: his business knowledge and his biblical learning. The contrast of this serious side of his nature to the scene of passionate outburst, noted by Stoll, enhances the comic effect. The inconsistency here represented in drawing Shylock is prominently shown again in I, iii, 95—118 which is too long to quote here. The inconsistency of this passionate outburst with the scheming, bloodthirsty, and businesslike Jew is proof that the Jew is comically drawn. In this long passage we hear him pouring forth his feelings in a style suitable only to a disturbed mind. His deliberate repeating verbatim what someone also said followed by what he would answer, is not at

¹⁸ Lines 40ff. (ed Dyce).

¹⁹ Lines 142ff and 344, (ed. Dyce).

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 241.

all in keeping with the stability of the Jew who just showed us his ability in business and his knowledge of the Scriptures. He immediately comes back to his scheming self-control when he pretends to befriend Antonio and inveigles him into signing the bond. This spasmodic anger, comically intended, is again shown in the Tubal-scene and probably in the speech: "Hath not a Jew eyes?" (III, i, 50 ff.)²¹. Regarding the long speech in the first act, one imitation from the *Jew of Malta*, "patient shrug", indicates that the whole passage may have been suggested in an earlier play. The speech: "Hath not a Jew eyes?" which is more responsible than anything else in the play for the tragic interpretation of the Jew, would not give a favorable impression to an Elizabethan audience, according to Stoll: "He proceeds to show that your Jew is no less than a man, and as such has a right, not to respect or compassion as the critics of a century have had it, but to revenge. Neither large nor lofty are his claims. Quite as vigorously and, in that day, with as much reason, the detestable and abominable Aaron defends his race and color, and Edmund the dignity of bastards. The worst of his villains Shakspere allows to plead their cause; their confidences in soliloquy, if not, as here, slight touches in the plea itself, sufficiently counteract any too favorable impression. This, on the face of it, is a plea for indulging in revenge in all its rigors; not a word is put in for the nobler side of Jewish character; and in lending Shylock his eloquence Shakspere is but giving the devil his due²²."

The whole process of the Jew's mind puts him at variance not only with the other characters in the play, including even his own daughter and servant but also with the audience. Jessica's remark

"But though I am a daughter to his blood
I am not to his manners." (II, iii, 18—19.)

places her outside the understanding of the Jew. Poor Launcelot left him because he could not understand his treatment. Even Tubal

²¹ Stoll gives little importance to this speech, *op. cit.* p. 243.

²² *Op. cit.* p. 243.

(III, i, 69 ff.), a member of his own race, cannot grasp his way of thinking. As for the audience, the mere name of usurer was in their minds closely associated with that of Jew and the literature of the day as well as social feeling was so thoroughly prejudiced against them that their position in society was an exoteric one. The audience easily saw through the falseness of his statements. Like Bassanio they doubted his words to Antonio:

"I will extend this friendship:

And, for my love, I pray you wrong me not." (I, iii.)

He untruthfully accused Launcelot, his servant, of gormandizing and hypocritically remarked to Jessica:

"Let not the sound of shallow foppery enter
My sober house." (II, iv., 35—6.)

To an audience who stood aloof and found him insincere his defense of vengeance on the common ground of the senses, passions, eating, hurting, healing, bleeding, tickling, *etc.*, reduces itself *ad absurdum* to a cheap and comic form of excuse.

Home life. With regard to Shylock's home life, there are statements in the text to make it unmistakable that the Jew was meant to be put in an unfavorable light. When he says: "I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear!" (III, i, 77—8), it must be construed as meaning that he cared little for his daughter, because it fully confirms what Jessica twice before told us about their domestic relations. There is no reason at all for us to mistrust Jessica's plain statement: "Our house is hell," (II, iii, 2), and in the same scene we are told in a soliloquy by Jessica that Shylock's habits are such that Jessica is ashamed of being his daughter. She desires to end her unhappiness by marrying Lorenzo and becoming a Christian:

"I shall end this strife,

Become a Christian and thy loving wife!" (II, iii, 20—1.)

The unmistakable meaning in Jessica's soliloquy makes it imperative that we interpret Shylock's words in the third act: "I would my daughter were dead at my foot," as confirmation and a repetition of the same sentiment expressed previously by his

daughter. The remark concerning Leah which immediately follows this outburst is thus negatived and made humorous: "I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor." (III, i, 108.) This passage was meant, as Stoll says, to bring a smile on the faces of the audience²³.

Trial Scene. Professor Stoll, pointing out the comic element of the Jew's actions at the Trial-Scene, observes the two places where critics may make him a pathetic figure:

"Nay, take my life and all: pardon not that:
You take my house when you do take the prop
That doth sustain my house; you take my life
When you do take the means whereby I live."
(IV, i, 372 f)

"I pray you give me leave to go from hence;
I am not well: (IV, i, 93—4.)

Stoll thinks that such remarks by the miser and usurer were received by the Elizabethan audience with laughter²⁴.

I should divide the fourth act into two parts, each distinct in tone from the other. The intenseness of the first part is not to be doubted from the point of view of the Elizabethan audience (or the modern audience for that matter). But the feeling of the audience in the first half is not centered in the Jew but in Antonio, who in this part of the act is the real tragic figure. The intenseness is brought to a climax by a rising series of cold-blooded remarks, all, but the first, spoken by the Jew:

"Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?"
(IV, i, 121)

"I stand for the law." (IV, i, 142)

"An oath, an oath I have an oath in heaven."
(IV, i, 226)

"Nearest the merchant's heart." (IV, i, 231)

"I stay here on my bonds." (IV, i, 240).

Portia adds to the intenseness of the approaching tragedy:

²³ *Op. cit.* p. 274. The reference to his daughter and to Leah are meant for laughter: „The laughter is not restrained, either, but would be nothing less than a roar.“

²⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 274.

"Therefore lay bare your bosom," "Are there balance here to weigh the flesh?" (IV, i, 250 und 253). The sixteenth century audience could not have smiled while these suggestions of death to their saintly hero were being spoken. We can find no comical remarks by anyone in the first part of this act. Antonio's pathetic farewell to Bassanio increases the seriousness of the situation. But when the quibble comes, Shakspeare brings out the moral weakness of the Jew. Shylock's strong intellect does not continue to operate, else he would have challenged vigorously the quibbling of Portia. The dramatist destroyed the Jew's characterization at this point and sacrificed consistency for the purpose of gaining a great dramatic effect. Shylock's sudden weakness is a comic contrast to what we were led to believe he was. When Portia showed him the peril he was in, if he took more or less than a pound of flesh, he immediately gave up the suit. Instead of giving up his own life in order to complete his vengeance on his enemy, he utterly failed to show any spark of heroism in his bones. This is the hypocrisy of the Jew and it must have been comical to the audience. Portia urges him to take his forfeiture as though challenging him to carry out the spirit of his plans but he, like a miser, begs for his money. This is all comical. Previously, he alienated our sympathies by refusing several times to be merciful. He expressed more than once his determination to have Antonio's life. Our estimation of him all through the scene is that he is a heartless villain. When Portia at last turns the law against him, the tense atmosphere is relieved by Shylock's weakness. He retrenches, by giving up the suit and demanding the money offered him. This comic compromise is made more ridiculous in the eyes of a prejudiced audience, by his plea to take his life and by the remarks of the alert and mocking Gratiano who just previously said, "Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang thyself." (IV, i, 362.) Shylock's other remark, "I am not well" must have reacted on the audience in the same spirit. Creizenach says that Burbage must have accompanied this remark with comical, grotesque gesticulations²⁵. "And Gratiano's

²⁵ *Jahrbuch*, LI, p. 176.

remarks," adds Creizenach, "in this scene certainly found the approval of the audience." Moreover, the speech, "Nay take my life," is a borrowing from Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, a play in which the Jew, Barabas, is grotesque from start to finish.

As for the enforced conversion of Shylock, another element in the play which to most critics throws a pathetic light on his character, that question has been settled by Professor Stoll and I can do no better than to quote him here. He assigns this feature of the play to Gosson's old play or to the *Jew of Malta*. "Coercion of unbelievers was an immemorial practice, not in Shakspere's day by any means discredited, and never condemned by Shakspere himself. 'Personal religion', 'convictions' were terms not then current, and according to the rough-and-ready manners of the time, Antonio's mercenary stipulation—not much more so, by the way, than that with which nowadays a Catholic king offers his hand and crown to a Protestant princess—is of course to be reckoned as an exemplary kindness, or as Portia calls it, a mercy rendered him. 'Provided that for this favor he becomes a Christian!' The idea is old-fashioned, like the Duke's notion of clemency to the Jews, or St. Louis's expedient for making his own and his ancestors' salvation sure, but nothing could be further from Shakspere's thought than Professor Jastrow's suggestion of satire or irony²⁶."

PORTIA.

Love for Bassanio. The love which Portia has for Bassanio is repeatedly stated throughout the play. There is no room to doubt what Portia's feelings are from the beginning to the end of the play. It is the simplest sort of romantic love at first sight. Nerissa expresses a sentimental feeling toward Bassanio in the first scene in which she and her mistress appear. The same feeling is entertained by Portia in her remark: "I remember him worthy of thy praise." (I, ii, 113.) In the second act, where we have much evidence of Portia's lively wit, there is a dialogue between Portia and her servant that tells us beyond a doubt

²⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 257.

where the heroine's heart lies. The servant's speech (lines 90—94) is too poetical and fine for such a character. Its purpose may be to keep up the atmosphere of romance and love in the minds of the audience. But this is not all. It is poor taste to put such a speech in the mouth of a servant. But Shakspeare, here, was not thinking of characterization or taste. Words spoken by a faithful servant cannot be false. The words about Bassanio are uttered for the audience to accept as true; so we should picture Bassanio as he is given in the servant's description:

"So likely an ambassador of love:
A day in April never came so sweet."
(II, ix, 91—92)

That the undramatic figure of a servant should speak these words is reason enough that Shakspeare meant the audience to conceive Bassanio as a perfect or ideal lover. Portia's answer should leave no one in doubt that she expects Bassanio to be her love, and Nerissa makes it positive to the audience that Bassanio will choose the right casket:

"Bassanio, lord love, if thy will it be!"
(II, ix, 100).

Later on in the casket scene we have admissions on Portia's part of her love for Bassanio. In the first long speech of the second scene of the third act, there is more art displayed than realism. Portia's embarrassment in this speech leads her to many contradictions such as "but it is not love", (4) "and yet a maiden hath no tongue, but thought, —" "So will I never be", *etc.*, which are all suddenly cast aside in a frank expression of love: "and so all yours!" While using such art in portraying the feelings, Shakspeare did not have to bother about the improbability of a maiden speaking out frankly her passions. At the very beginning of this speech, Portia gave her preference for Bassanio:

"for, in choosing wrong,
I lose your company." (line 3.)

Portia, further on, tells us what Nerissa told us previously, that Bassanio will choose the right casket:

"If you do love me you will find me out.

(III, ii, 41.)

Thus, naively does Shakspeare make known and repeat the love of Portia for Bassanio. In the sixteenth century there was not much psychology to be indulged in. The guide for love stories, as Jusserand tells us, was found in the popular novels of the day. There was nothing unexpected in matters of love-affairs. Jusserand excellently explains the regular balance in such stories: "Breton published in 1600 his 'Strange fortunes of two excellent princes', which his modern editor does not hesitate to declare 'a bright and *characteristic* little book'. This little masterpiece begins thus, in very *characteristic* fashion indeed: 'In the Ilandes of Balino, neere unto the city of Dulno, there lived a great Duke named Firente This lord had to wife a sweet lady called Merilla, a creature of much worth. This blessed lord and lady had issue male, only a sonne named Penillo and female, one onlie daughter named Marilla.' These two children were famous for their wit and beauty: 'But I will entreat of another Duke, who dwelt in the Ilands of Cotasie This Duke had to name Orillo, a man famous for much worth as well in wit as in valour. This duke had to wife a gratious ladie She had by her lord the duke two blessed children, a sonne and a daughter; her sonne Fantiro and her daughter, Sinilla.' These two children begat wonders for their wit and their beauty. What do you think will follow? The two perfect young men, of course, will marry the two unique young women, and the only perceptible interest in the tale is to see from what improbable incidents such likely consequences are derived. We can safely, it seems, class this novel in the same category as 'Arbasto', 'Mamillia', and other products of Greene's pen²⁷."

²⁷ J. J. Jusserand, *The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare* p. 199, f.

Portia is unmodest about herself to a point not at all probable in real life. The long passage spoken by her in act III, Sc. 2, lines 149—174, is hardly to be expected of a lady of Portia's standing in life. The most extreme terms are used by her to show her love for Bassanio:

"yet for you

I would be trebled twenty times myself;

A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich;

That, only to stand high in your account,

I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,

Exceed account;"

(III, ii, 152—157)

The remainder of this speech is in the same tenor. The ring episode is started off at the end of this lovesick speech. Bassanio accepts the ring as a pledge after saying impossible things about the state of his feelings.

"Only my blood speaks to you in my veins, *etc.*

(III, ii, 176 ff.)

The picture is one of devoted lovers. The whole of Portia's speech leads naturally to the presentation of the ring. In emphasizing so strongly the feelings of love in both Portia and Bassanio, Shakspeare had in mind the whole ring episode which was to follow. To make the situation at the end of the play appear playful and teasing, it was necessary to make an impression of mutual love which would remain with the audience throughout the play. Portia is perfectly sincere in her expressions of love and the audience is made to understand time and again, that her love is given without the least reserve. The trick of the ring, therefore is entirely playful on Portia's part. The speech banishes from the mind of the audience any thought that Portia would ever suspect Bassanio of really being false to her.

Choice of Caskets. From our discussion of Portia's love, we are led to think of the casket-scene. Ulrici thought that Shakspeare had surmounted the difficulty of combining two incredible stories by making each one excuse the other. Quiller-Couch thinks that the dramatist managed the difficulty by distracting "the

attention from the monstrosities and absurdities of the plot²⁸". Elze's moralizing statement that the meaning of the lottery is to keep Portia from an independence unsuitable to her sex, is not warranted by the text²⁹. We have just noted several statements, one by Nerissa and one by Portia, which told us that Bassanio is to win in the choice. We know for certain that Portia's love is repeatedly told to us through the mouths of those whom we must believe as speaking the truth. With her love known by the audience, Nerissa makes the significant explanation about the lottery: It will "no doubt, never be chosen by any rightly but one who shall rightly love." The choosing is therefore not so important after all to the story, as we know that the right lover is Bassanio. The character of the lover determines the choice of the caskets.

"For the portrayal of character in this choice and through the play he (Shakspere) has used a number of motives which were so conventional in the literature of the Renaissance that their meaning must have been perfectly clear to his audience³⁰." Baskerville in a study entitled "Bassanio as an Ideal Lover", gives an admirable explanation of the element of Platonic love in the casket-scene. The views of Plato's doctrine of divine beauty were popularized in England by Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Courtier*. The significance of Bassanio's and Portia's long speeches was therefore clear to Shakspere's audience.

The treatment of the casket-scene can be shown to have a definite basis on Renaissance theories of love. Symbolism is used in this scene to a greater extent than in any other Shakspere play. Baskerville thus explains Bassanio's speech before choosing the casket: "Then as he reflects on the caskets with its declaration that fancy—constantly used, to indicate sensual love—fed by the eyes, dies in its own indulgence of sense. As a lover who recognizes the fact that character and not surface beauty

²⁸ *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, p. 87.

²⁹ See above.

³⁰ C. R. Baskerville, *Manly Anniversary Studies in Language and Literature*, p. 99.

is the basis of true love and that intemperate lust for worldly acclaim and inordinate self-love represent perversions through sense or fancy, Bassanio picks up the thought and applies it³¹:

"So may the outward showes be least themselves."

(III, ii, 73.)

Just before Bassanio makes this remark, a beautiful song is sung which informs the lover, through Platonic reasoning, what casket he should choose:

Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head?
How begot, how nourished?

Reply, reply.

It is engender'd in the eyes,
With gazing fed; and fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies.

Let us all ring fancy's knell

I'll begin it, — Ding, dong, bell (III, ii).

The principle of Platonic love embodied in this song is defined by Castiglione in his *Courtier*³². Love, so we are told, is engendered by the contemplation of sensuous beauty through the eyes. Reason and understanding then raises this merely sensuous appeal to a concept of heavenly beauty. The song therefore turns the thought of a lover familiar with Renaissance theories of love to a right conception of love, and this would guide him in the choice of the inscriptions.

Baskerville makes the following remarks on the conventional aspects of the treatment of love in the play, which were familiar to Shakspeare's audience³³:

1. "The symbolic use of the caskets comes from medieval

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Addressing „holy love“, Castiglione says (p. 363, Ed. Raleigh, *Tutor Translations*): „Thou the most sweet bond of the world, a meane betwixt heavenlye and earthlye thynges, wyth a bountiful; tempre bendest the high vertues to the government of the lower and tounring back the mindes of mortall men to their beginning, cooplest them with it.“

³³ *Op. cit.* p. 94.

maxims and fables of the fallacy of judging by surface appearances."

2. This medieval symbol was fitted to the Platonic theory. "With it is joined through the lyric, 'Tell me where is fancy bred?' the kindred idea of the impermanence of the love based on the appeal of external beauty of the senses, a connection made by modifying the medieval conceits of love to fit a Platonic distinction between true and false love."

3. "The idea of testing character through its judgment of values was old. The maxims on the scrolls are merely sententious expressions of one of the usual morals drawn from the fable, or exemplum, on which the casket scenes were based. The popularity that this exemplum enjoyed in the Middle Ages continued in the sixteenth century."

Illustrations of the fallacy of judging by appearances are frequent: *Euphues* (Ed. Arber, pp. 53—54): "the contemplation of the inward qualities ought to bee respected, more than the view of the outward beautie." Greene applies the casket story to his discussion of true and false love in *Mamillia* (1580): "he which maketh choyce of bewty without vertue commits as much folly as Critius did, in choosing a golden box filled with rotten bones³⁴". The distinction between heavenly and earthly love was made in early Renaissance, and the assigning of earthly love to the eyes and heavenly love to the heart is common in the sixteenth century literature. Shakspeare previously expressed the same thought in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*:

"Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind"
(I, i, 234).

It also occurs in *Romeo and Juliet*:

young men's love then lies
Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes."
(II, iii, 67—68).

Her Nobility. There are several places in the text which tell us that Portia has a generous and noble spirit. Lorenzo,

³⁴ The reference is also ascribed to imitation from Gosson's "*Jew*" by one critic. (*Jahr.* XLIII, 250).

speaking directly to Portia, bluntly informs the audience of her noble character:

"Madam, although I speak it in your presence,
You have a noble and a true conceit
Of god-like amity": (III, iv, 1—3)

At the end of this complimentary speech, he speaks of her "customary bounty". In answering Lorenzo, she shows her generosity by the words:

"How little is the cost I have bestowed,
In purchasing the semblance of my soul."
(III, iv, 19—20)

In another passage, Shakespere characterizes Portia at the expense of consistency of treatment. In the second scene of the third act, Jessica states that her father would rather have Antonio's pound of flesh than "twenty times" the principle of the bond.

"When I was with him, I have heard him swear
To Tubal and to Chus, his countrymen,
That he would rather have Antonio's flesh
Than *twenty times* the value of the sum
That he did owe him: and I know, my Lord,
If law, authority, and power deny not,
It will go hard with poor Antonio."

(III, ii, 279—85.)

The situation at the moment that this is spoken is one that calls for a statement of Shylock's cruel intentions so that Portia may be apprised of the full danger threatening Antonio. The passage conveys plainly the utter hopelessness of appealing to Shylock. The purpose of it is to emphasize the bloodthirstiness of Shylock by declaring that no appeal to his avarice can overcome his murderous intent on Antonio's life.

This clear emphasis on "twenty times" apparently made no impression on Portia, for she immediately questions Bassanio concerning the sum required to release Antonio, and, in a long speech evidently meant to show the heroine's unlimited generosity, assumes that her money will purchase the merchant's freedom.

"Portia: What sum owes he the Jew?"

Bassanio: For me, three thousand ducats.

Portia:

What no more?

Pay him six thousand and deface the bond;
 Double six thousand, and then treble that,
 Before a friend of this description
 Shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault.
 First go with me to church and call me wife,
 And then away to Venice to your friend;
 For never shall you lie by Portia's side
 With an unquiet soul. You shall have gold
 To pay the petty debt *twenty times* over;
 When it is paid, bring your friend along.

(III, ii, 292—304.)

After what Jessica has already said concerning her father's determination, Portia's solution is no solution at all. Curiously enough, she repeats the very sum which Jessica had referred to. The explanation can be easily found in Shakspere's method of writing for scenic effect. An opportunity was here given of bringing out again Portia's generosity. The figure "twenty times" was still in the dramatist's mind and was used over again to emphasize this side of the heroine's character.

Another case of neglect that brings out this dominant side of Portia's nature is much more serious as it involves the neglect of Jessica's character:

Jessica: I am very sorry when I hear sweet music.

(V. 69)

Jessica is impressionistic and childlike, and never delves deeply into her feelings. Her thoughts are of the lightest sort. She amuses herself, jesting with Launcelot (III, iv), and shows herself in her true oriental nature in the frivolous combat of words with her lover at the beginning of act V. Quite alien to her character, therefore, is the lovely and *thoughtful* speech she utters about Portia:

"Past all expressing. It is very meet
 The Lord Bassanio live an upright life:
 For having such a blessing in his lady,
 He finds the joys of heaven here on earth;
 And if on earth he do not mean it, then
 In reason he should never come to heaven.
 Why, if two gods should play some heavenly match,
 And on the wager lay two earthly women,
 And Portia one, there must be something else
 Pawn'd with the other; for the poor rude world
 Hath not her fellow. (III, iv, 49 ff.)

This passage, with reference to good characterization as well as to its inappropriateness in the scene, is certainly a crudity and argues the dramatist's tendency, in the early plays at least, to lapse into primitive methods in order to emphasize an important idea to the audience or to ornament a scene with a speech entertaining in itself. The scene is a wholly jesting one until Lorenzo abruptly asks her opinion of Portia. Jessica on the sixteenth century stage must have dropped her own character for a moment and facing the audience gave her keen analysis of Bassanio's duty to Portia and questioned his going to heaven if he does not return her love. She speaks of "heaven" as a familiar word to her although just married to a Christian. The word "heaven" then leads her to think of Portia as a fit prize for a "heavenly match". The speech is far too thoughtful for the Jewess. It is worked out like one of Portia's and is evidently a clear case of Shakespeare's neglect of consistent characterization in order to impress again upon the audience the nobility of Portia's character. Baskerville through different reasoning comes to the conclusion that the passage is corrupt. Discussing the Platonic theory of love he says: "Jessica in an obscure passage that may be corrupt seems to state that it can be only through his own earthly love that Bassanio can fail to find in Portia's spiritual quality the ideal which furnishes 'the stayers' mentioned by Castiglione³⁵."

³⁵ *Op. cit.* p. 103. Verity says the passage argues the development of character. The dramatic necessities, I think, outweigh such an interpretation.

Baskerville thinks the passage puts too much stress on earthly love.

The explanation of Shakspere's over-statement of Portia's nobility of nature is easily found in the literature of Shakspere's day and also in the lives of many noble women, exemplified best in Queen Elizabeth. Jusserand makes this point clear: "The earliest attempts at the novel in the modern style bore a resemblance to these social and intellectual manners. Let us not be surprised if these works are too heavily bedizened for our liking: the toilette and fashiones of that time were less sober than those of to-day; it was the same with literature. Queen Elizabeth, who was wholly representative of her age, and shared even its follies liked and encouraged finery in everything. All that was ornament and pageantry held her favor; in spite of public affairs, she remained all her life the most feminine of women; on her gowns, in her palaces, with her poets, she liked to find ornaments and embellishment in profusion. The learned queen who read Plutarch in Greek, a thing Shakspere could never do, and translated Boethius into English, found, in spite of her philosophy, an immense delight in having herself painted in fantastic costumes, her thin person hidden in a silken sheath, covered by a light gauze, over which birds ran. Around her was a perpetual field of cloth of gold, etc.³⁶."

Her intellect. This leads us naturally to a discussion of Portia's strong intellect. There is no information given us by any of the characters in the play concerning Portia's practical wisdom. Certainly, her actions indicate that her intelligence is remarkable. This is seen especially before and during the Trial-scene. A remark which she, herself, lets fall is that she is an "unlesson'd girl". (III, ii, 159.) This is generally understood to mean that she does not have the education which men are accustomed to have. She expresses the same idea when she says:

Such a habit

That they shall think we are accomplished

With that we lack. (III, iv, 60—2.)

³⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 92.

The meaning that is meant to be conveyed is that she is truly feminine. Portia shows a great deal of book-learning such as in the following passage:

Now he goes,

With no less presence, but with much more love,
 Than young Alcides, when he did redeem
 The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
 To the sea-monster; I stand for sacrifice;
 The rest aloof are the Dardanian wives,
 With bleared visages, come forth to view
 The issue of the exploit. Go, Hercules,
 Live thou, I live; with much more dismay
 I view the fight than thou that mak'st the fray.

(III, ii, 53—62.)

The poetical value of this speech is more important than its dramatic. It was no doubt received by the audience with no reflection on Portia's learning. Legends and myths from ancient and mediaeval times flooded the literature of the Renaissance through the popularity of such works as Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the English versions of the *Gesta Romanorum*. It was conventional to make reference to these stories which the audience accepted as stock-in-trade of the playwright. One critic has shown that many of the passages are descriptions of Renaissance paintings and it may be that this is such a reminiscence.

We can see Hazlitt's lack of historical sense when he says of Portia that there is "a certain degree of affectation and pedantry about her". He was no doubt thinking of the Trial-Scene. Portia in this scene shows practical knowledge. It is a mark of many of Shakspeare's women, especially, Lady Macbeth. And yet we noted above that she is unlessoned in the world, uneducated in the sense of lacking worldly wisdom. There is every evidence that the Romantic literature of the day gave to women much intuitive insight. "English gentlewomen are *prodigies of wisdom* and beauty"; says Jusserand, "and indeed that is the

least Lyly can say of them, since it is for them that he is writing³⁷." Coupled with this wisdom, the romantic Lyly gave them other virtues to make them ideal: "Englishwomen spend their mornings 'in devout prayer', and not in bed like the ladies of Italy; they read scriptures instead of Ariosto and Petrarch." To sum up, "they are in prayer devoute, in bravery humble, in beauty chaste, in feasting temperate, in affection wise, in mirth modest, in all their actions though courtlye, because women, yet angels, because virtuous³⁸." Jusserand tells us that Caxton's enumeration of the chief qualities of the women of his country is practically the same as Lyly's³⁹. The French author quotes the following extract from the preface of a certain translation by Lord Rivers: "Of whatsoever condition women ben in Greece, the women of this country ben right good, wyse, playsant, humble, discrete, sobre, chaste, obedient to their husbands, trewe, secrete, stedfast, ever busy and never ydle, attemperat in speking and vertuous in all their werkis—or, atte leste shold be soo⁴⁰." Portia was not intended to have more than an intuitive knowledge of a highly cultured woman. The skill with which she handles a legal difficulty led Hunter to think that she is too mannish. Creizenach⁴¹ has shown, however, that the arguments used by Portia are not her own but those of Bellario. Moreover, Portia retains her attractive grace at the Trial-Scene by the quality-of-mercy speech which she delivers in the midst of the legal battle.

The high-spirited Portia shows the witty side of her nature in the fourth scene of the third act. This scene is inconsistent with what actually occurs at the Trial Scene. She addresses Nerissa:

Come on, Nerissa; I have work in hand
That you know not of; we'll see our husbands
Before they think of us. (III, iv, 57—59.)

In the next long speech (lines 60—78) she is imitating in a very smashing fashion a page, a "bragging youth", "bragging Jacks", and not, as we should expect, a dignified doctor. She means in

³⁷ *Op. cit.* p. 133.

³⁹ *Op. cit.* p. 133.

³⁸ Lyly, *Euphues* (Arber) p. 442.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 134.

⁴¹ *Jahr.* LI, p. 180.

this scene to assume a "pretty fellow's" dress and not the flowing robes of a doctor. Her work at the trial has nothing in it of the "mincing steps" and "quaint lies" which she here talks about. To bring out the witty side of her character, Shakspeare has disregarded the facts of the story. Moreover, it was conventional in the sixteenth century literature to impart the most extravagant wit to the heroine. Jusserand speaking of Lodge's "Rosalynde" says that she (Rosalind) had 'wit full of repartees, her mind full of shifts, and equal, in fact, to any emergency⁴². When Rosalynd is arranging to disguise herself as a page, she shows the same high spirit as Portia: "Tush, quoth Rosalynd, art thou a woman and hast not a sodaine shift to prevent a misfortune? I, thou seest, am of a tall stature, and would very well become the person and apparell of a page; thou shalt be my mistris, and I will play the man so properly, that, trust me, in what company so ever I come, I will not bee discovered. I will buy mee a suite, and have my rapier very handsomely at my side, and if any knave offer wrong, your page will show him the point of his weapon⁴³."

Portia is also allowed by Shakspeare to indulge in maximatic speeches (Nerissa also), a convention received by the audience at its face value. Such a speech is the following which is evoked by Portia's disgust at her father's will concerning the choosing of her husband:

If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do,
 chapels had been churches, and poor men's
 cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows
 his own instructions; I can easier teach twenty what were
 good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine
 own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood;
 but a hot temper leaps over a cold decree: such a hare is
 madness the youth, to skip over the meshes of good counsel
 the cripple. But this reasoning is not in the fashion to
 choose me a husband. O me, the word "choose"! etc.

(I, ii, 11—24.)

⁴² *Op. cit.* p. 205.

⁴³ *ibid.*

Yet further on (line 100) she is perfectly contented to abide by her father's will. The maximatic speech seemed to compensate for the inconsistency. It shows that a nicely worded speech was more important than strict consistency in characterization. The audience did not trouble themselves about such scruples as long as the speech itself was worth hearing. Similarly, Portia quibbles on the word "rack" in her conversation with Bassanio (III, ii, 24—32) which gives her for a time the stilted effect of the early drama. Verity tries to read characterization into the practice by saying that "Shakspere makes his characters jest thus in moments of great emotion—especially bitterness—as a relief to their feelings⁴⁴". It would be more correct to say that the jesting is given as a relief to the audience after the long drawn out speech of Portia just preceding (III, ii, 1—24).

The treatment of the ring incident in the fifth act is a fine example of "dramatic irony". It brings out that side of Portia's wit which shows her teasing disposition. Such scenes were very common in Shakspere's day and Shakspere was only following the common practice. There is connected with this, too, her merry prattle which she keeps up with her maid. In Lodge's popular novel "Rosalynde" there is much of this conventional matter. The conversations between Rosalynde and her maid are very pleasant. In the guise of a man, she speaks very wittily about woman's hardness of heart. The teasing disposition of Rosalynde is very prominent especially when she pities the page for not equaling the perfections of his mistress.

There is a real inconsistency at the end of the play where Portia suddenly discloses a letter which contains the news of the safe arrival of Antonio's ships. The double artificialty of putting the mysterious letter in the hands of Portia and giving the audience the unbelievable happy news, is not at all well knit with the story. It is purely a conventional ending, common in the literature of the day. It is a case of the "imaginary" letters which the audience accepted without inquiring about the sender. Jusserand says about these letters in the novels of the day: "The

⁴⁴ See Verity's note to III, ii, 24—32.

group around Greene and Lyly felt a keen pleasure in composing imaginary letters. This method was taken over from the writers of the Middle Ages. Breton, an extreme case, published a volume of imaginary letters from everybody and anybody on any subject. The public liked these compositions and their composers became very popular⁴⁵." But how artificial it is to put the letter into the hands of Portia. It is logically inconsistent because she knows nothing of mercantile affairs. But the dramatist here as elsewhere is sacrificing consistency to bring about the dominant quality of nobility and kindness in his heroine. The incident, aside from giving the customary pleasant ending to the comedy, here serves also to heighten the graciousness of Portia.

BASSANIO.

I have brought out already the conventionality of Bassanio's deep friendship with Antonio. I have here only to point out a slight improbability in this relationship. An exaggerated statement is made by Bassanio while speaking to Antonio:

"The Jew shall have my flesh and bones and all.

Ere thou shalt lose for me one drop of blood."

(IV, i, 112—113.)

This statement could not possibly be carried out under the legal circumstances. It cannot, certainly, be taken as a seriously meant declaration. The deep love of Bassanio for Antonio is the reason for the lines; the same unreal, romantic love which the poet has taken so much pains throughout the poem to emphasize

Prodigality. The prodigality of Bassanio so apparent in the first part of the play has been the subject of some comment among critics. Subjective criticism has entered in, such as Skottowe's which labeled Bassanio as selfish and irresponsible for allowing his friend to risk his life in order to replenish his wasted funds⁴⁶. Quiller-Couch takes the subjective interpretation to the extreme when he comments thus on Bassanio's attitude towards Antonio in the first part of the play: "Bassanio, to do him justice, is not

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁴⁶ See above.

trying to wheedle Antonio by this sort of talk; he knows his friend too deeply for that. But he is deceiving *himself*, or rather is reproducing some of the trash with which he has already deceived himself⁴⁷." Quiller-Couch goes on in the same subjective way of interpretation with Bassanio's relationship with Portia⁴⁸. In writing *The Merchant of Venice*, in which a usurer takes the most important part, it was necessary, to be consistent with sixteenth century convention, to have a prodigal appear by the side of the usurer⁴⁹. The cue to the situation in *The Merchant of Venice*, I think, is contained in Shylock's speech, III, i, 37—42, where the Jew mentions the "prodigal" and "usurer" in the same sentence. The confusion, here, is that Shylock speaks of Antonio as a prodigal and not of Bassanio. Warburton asks why should Antonio be called a prodigal and proceeds to change the text. Johnson and Edwards regard Antonio as a prodigal for his liberality⁵⁰. The indication here, I think, points to the identity of the merchant and the prodigal in the old play, *The Jew*. In the Casket-Scene, the long speeches by Bassanio give him a more serious role. There is no inconsistency involved in this change of temperament as it was only conventional that the lover should become Platonic in his expressions of love. In the first place, the best way, in the literature of Shakspere's day to gain the loving regard of women, is to be handsome, witty and charming⁵¹. The principal speech by Bassanio in the Casket-Scene, that which he speaks after the song on fancy, III, ii, 73—107, is thoughtful in character. Bassanio ruminates and analyzes his thoughts until a mass of stock phrases and ideas are uttered. We have only to turn to *Euphues* to understand the artificial way in which these lover's speeches were treated in literature. Jusserand tells us just what the author of *Euphues* was doing, and certainly Shakspere was not behind his time: "On love matters and women's affairs, he was considered an authority; the *analysis of the passions* and the knowledge of the *deeper moods of the soul*, which many consider to be, among novelists, a new-born science, were regarded

⁴⁷ See above.⁴⁸ *Op. cit.* p. 83.⁴⁹ Stonex P.M.L.A. 31.⁵⁰ Furness, *op. cit.*, p. 126.⁵¹ Jusserand, *op. cit.* p. 135.

by his contemporaries as a thing wholly his, a discovery made by himself; not foreseeing his successors, they proclaimed him a master of the newly invented art⁵²."

But the prejudice which a modern reader might have against Bassanio can be refuted on other grounds than literary convention. If we are to consider him as a mere adventurer and spendthrift, we disregard the attitude of others in the play itself. Antonio, as we have already seen, found him worthy of his love. Portia climaxes her estimation by the words:

"else nothing in the world
Could turn so much the constitution
Of any constant man." (III, ii, 240—3.)

There is no one in the play who throws the least doubt on his character, except Shylock who no doubt included Bassanio in his slanderous remarks against the Christians. But this animosity is general and not trustworthy. The judgment of those who know Bassanio—the judgment which would convey to us the intention of the dramatist—is entirely favorable to him⁵³. The remarkably poetic and timely remark of the servant—who is dramatically not suitable for the fine speech—is the attitude of the sixteenth century audience toward Bassanio:

"Yet I have not seen
So likely an ambassador of love;
A day in April never came so sweet,
To show how costly summer was at hand,
As this fore-spurrer comes before his lord."
(II, ix, 90—94.)

JESSICA.

Flight. In *The Merchant of Venice* there are three instances of a maiden donning man's clothes for the purpose of effecting some plan in the outside world. Jessica's purpose is

⁵² *ibid.* p. 139.

⁵³ H. Grierson agrees with this view: „Antonio and Portia found him lovable, and no one in the play throws the least doubt on their judgment." *Contemporary Review*, 120, p. 668.

more in accord with the romantic convention than Portia's. Like Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* she wants to be with her lover. Most critics like Elze have attributed the cause of Jessica's flight to the lack of proper moral relationship between father and daughter, one critic at least putting the entire blame on the daughter. The first information we get from the text concerning the flight is in the second act:

Gratiano: Was not that letter from fair Jessica?

Lorenzo: I must needs tell her all. She hath directed
How I shall take her from her father's house;
What gold and jewels she is furnished with;
What page's suit she hath in readiness.
If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven,
It will be for his gentle daughter's sake:
And never dare misfortune cross her foot,
Unless she do it under this excuse,
That she is issue of a faithless Jew.
Come, go with me: peruse this as thou goest:
Fair Jessica shall be my torch-bearer.

(II, iv, 29—39.)

As is Shakspeare's custom, we have in the speech the whole inside story of the flight of the two lovers. Lorenzo is taking his friend into his confidence by telling him the contents of Jessica's letter but the thing to note is that the speech is *essentially an explanation to the audience*. The speech is too formal to be naturally addressed to Gratiano. All details of stealing the gold and Jessica's donning a male suit, is told frankly to the audience. Even the relationship between father and daughter, over which some critics are concerned is settled in this passage so far as the dramatist is concerned. The faithlessness of the Jew is cause enough for the flight. Anything done against a Jew in the sixteenth century was excusable.

The intention of the dramatist with regard to Jessica is impressed on the audience in the short scene where the Jewess first

appears with Launcelot as well as in Lorenzo's soliloquy above quoted. Jessica tells us that her relations with her father are unbearable; Launcelot calls her "most pure Jew" and predicts the elopement with Lorenzo; and Jessica in a short soliloquy tells of her plan to marry the Christian. If we do not accept these statements at their face value, Jessica's part in the story is difficult to understand. If we attempt to read into her character, there are inconsistencies everywhere. We might say that she left her home with no thought of pious duty toward her father. She goes to Belmonte and is accepted there by a higher social order without question. She also shows callousness in trading her father's ring for a monkey. She actually arranges and takes the leading part in the elopement. Yet these acts are done by a young girl who can converse sympathetically on music and love. Furness goes further and points out that there is nothing in her character to show that she is a Jew's daughter. "She is lavish in money to Gobbo, and profusely lavish of it on her own pleasures; she has fallen in love with a gay Christian, and longs to change her relation; she shows no respect for her dead mother, and not an atom of regard for her living father; her very complexion is not oriental, but fair. In the next scene her hand is spoken of as whiter than paper, and the contrast between Shylock and her is declared by Solarino to be greater than between jet and ivory. Lastly, is the Jessica out-nighting Lorenzo in moonlit Belmont the same Jessica who can find amusement in the merriment of a Gobbo⁵⁴?" To the sixteenth century audience the romantic element in Jessica's character is what is relished. That she is a rebellious daughter and irritates her father on every hand, no doubt pleased the Jew-hating public. They found nothing repulsive in Jessica's actions and could accept her as a girl of gentle disposition. Jessica is purely a product of the romantic atmosphere of Shakspeare's day and we should therefore accept her as being everything implied in Lorenzo's description of her, however inconsistent it may appear to us:

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

"For she is *wise*, if I can judge of her;
 And *fair* she is, if that mine eyes be true;
 And therefore, like herself, wise, fair and true⁵⁵,
 Shall she be placed in my constant soul."

(II, vi, 53—57.)

The danger of not regarding Jessica's character from the romantic point of view results in interpretations which are not mentioned anywhere in the play. For example, Furness' conclusion about the Jewess is that the many inconsistencies lead us to suppose that she is not the daughter of Shylock⁵⁶.

GRATIANO.

The outstanding trait in Gratiano's character is told to us by Lorenzo at the beginning of the play, and that the audience may understand Lorenzo's meaning, Bassanio repeats in very elaborate language that Gratiano's talk amounts to nothing. When Gratiano makes his appearance on the stage, he gives us a sample of his cast of mind, in a long speech of twenty-six lines, beginning: "Let me play the fool." (I, i, 79—104.) The first phrase in this speech, "to play the fool", Warburton tells us is taken from the old farces⁵⁷. The next line about "old wrinkles" is a common idea found in *Love's Lab. Lost*, V, ii, 465⁵⁸. As for the belief that groans were mortifying, Furness tells us that it was

⁵⁵ The same phrase appears in *All's Well That Ends Well*, when the king of France makes the romantic defense of his proposal to marry the „poor physician's daughter“ by saying, „She is young, wise and fair“. (II, 3).

⁵⁶ *ibid.* The whole discussion by Furness on Jessica's character grew out of the line spoken by Launcelot: „If a Christian do not play the knave and get thee, I much deceived;“ (II, iii, 12) Furness prefers *did* as knavery could not apply to Lorenzo as her future husband. It is Shakspere's custom to emphasize important events. The intention of the elopement is plainly stated by Jessica in her soliloquy and by Lorenzo in his soliloquy in the scene following. This remark by Launcelot is but another emphasis on the same event that is about to take place. *Do* therefore is correct from this point of view instead of *did* which implies that Jessica is not the daughter of Shylock.

⁵⁷ Furness, *op. cit.*, p. II.

very common in Shakspeare's day and refers to *Rom. and Jul.* III, V, 58, and *Hamlet*, IV, iii, 128, etc.⁵⁹. The medical terms used to describe the mind's influence on the body were common in the medical books of the sixteenth century⁶⁰. The remark "let no dog bark" is proverbial; and the thought that a fool when he holds his peace is thought wise, is biblical, (*Proverbs*, XVII, 28)⁶¹. After all this familiar matter has poured from the mouth of the witty gentleman, Bassanio explains to the audience not to take him seriously:

"Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing more than any man in all Venice. His reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff; you shall seek all day ere you find them; and when you have them, they are not worth the search." (I, i, 14—8.)

We must accept Bassanio's estimation as the true make-up of Gratiano's character. It means that the audience of Shakspeare's day did not find anything new and instructive in what he said. And yet Hudson deliberately denies the truth of what Bassanio says, (*vide supra*). He thinks that Gratiano is a very "sensible man" and has remarkable strength and rectitude of mind" (*vide supra*). Birch, much worse, believes that the passage which expresses the most commonplace and humorous ideas in all Gratiano's remarks, was Shakspeare's own rebuke at religious people. (*vide supra*.)

All of the important speeches of Gratiano, including the one discussed above, are rendered in a style that is not realistic. A typical example is the following passage:

"That ever holds: who riseth from a feast
With that keen appetite that he sits down?
Where is the horse that doth untread again
His tedious measures with unbated fire.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Furness refers to Copland's *Dict. of Medicine* and Watson's *Lectures on Physic, ibid.*

⁶¹ „Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace is counted wise; and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.“

That he did pace them first? All things that are,
 Are with more spirit chased, than enjoyed.
 How like a younker or a prodigal
 The scarfed bark puts from her native bay,
 Hugg'd and embraced by the wanton wind!
 How like a prodigal doth she return,
 With over-weather'd ribs, and ragged sails,
 Lean, rent, and beggar'd by the wanton wind!"

(II, vi, 8—19.)

We notice in this speech two rhetorical questions (lines 8—12) and a very neat, catchy maxim, followed by a most extravagant, and drawn-out rhetorical exclamation, (lines 14—19). The whole passage is stilted. There is evidence here, as in all of Gratiano's speeches, of an effort to satisfy the audience's taste for high-sounding rhetoric. Just such formal speeches as Gratiano's—spoken no doubt directly to the audience—are the regular thing in old plays⁶².

NERISSA.

Critics have observed that Nerissa is not a lady's maid in the modern sense of the term but simply a well-bred lady in Portia's attendance. "It was still common in Shakespeare's day for girls of good families to enter into attendance upon ladies of higher rank, from whom they received not only material benefits, but also social and intellectual training⁶³." There is a sharp distinction made in Shakspeare's plays between waiting-ladies and domestic servants⁶⁴. Nerissa therefore belongs to the same class as Lucetta in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*.

⁶² An oversight in composition with regard to Gratiano in one place is significant. In III, ii, 236, Gratiano says: „We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece.“ This is reminiscent of what Bassanio says in I, i, 171f.: „Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand. And many Jasons come in quest of her.“ Oddly enough Gratiano was not in the latter scene to overhear Bassanio's reference to Jason. It indicates a confusion of characters.

⁶³ Parrott, *The Merchant of Venice*, p. 102.

⁶⁴ Miss Latham, *Trans. New Shaksp. Soc.* 1887—92, p. 91.

Nerissa is of much higher rank than the old traditional confidant who was called "nurse" although she shows traces of the worldly wisdom of that figure and has in general that figure's woodenness. Furthermore, Nerissa's language is as cultivated as that of her mistress. I think that Shakspeare was thinking more of Portia's high rank, so that instead of naming her a vulgar servant, which would reflect a mean environment, her position in life was raised to enhance the nobility of the heroine. We have seen how other things in the play served only to heighten the effect of Portia's gracious character. The placing of a cultured companion by her side is but another move in the same direction.

That Nerissa has no independent character is shown by the fact that nothing is spoken in the play about her. The principal traits of the other characters are echoed in the mouths of their companions. Even Gratiano is characterized for us by Bassanio. We should expect a word or so from Portia, which might emphasize some quality in the cultured lady by her side. But she does not speak a word. Nor does Nerissa indulge in any soliloquies, the usual means in Shakspeare of giving the audience an opportunity to understand a character.

Nerissa has absolutely no will of her own. She was meant only to reflect the thoughts and sentiments of Portia. The same function is given to Solanio and Solarino with respect to Antonio. I see no advance in Nerissa over Lucetta in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, unless a more frequent appearance on the stage is regarded as an advance⁶⁵. Lucetta's opportunity to describe her lady's lovers gives her much more distinction than Nerissa who in a similar scene is only allowed to do the questioning while Portia shows off her wit.

Nerissa's woodenness of character is exhibited in two ways. She uses a great many maxims which are meant to entertain the audience for their own value. The use of catchy sayings is

⁶⁵ Matthews speaks of Nerissa's being humanly drawn in the same sentence in which he speaks of Portia and Jessica: „Portia and Jessica and Nerissa are human and womanly and feminine.“ *Shakspeare as a Playwright*, p. 227) The emphasis here on Nerissa is, I think, over-stated.

a distinct characteristic of hers. She is thus given a certain amount of wisdom, yet she has no independent action of her own. To us, the proverbial utterances seem ridiculous in the mouth of a waiting-woman. To understand this practice we must remember that since the publication of John Haywood's book of proverbs and the beginning of the first regular drama in the Senecan style, the intrusion of these philosophical commonplaces into places, where artistically speaking, they could not be tolerated, was regarded by the audience as part of the dramatist's business. So we find Nerissa saying in the second scene of the first act: "Superfluity comes sooner by white hairs, but competency lives longer", and "It is no mean happiness to be seated in the mean". (II, ix, 82.)

Secondly, she is closely allied to, and imitative of, Portia. This makes her very unrealistic. Gratiano tells us that Nerissa will marry only when her mistress marries:

"I get a promise of this fair one here,
To have her love, provided that your fortune
Achieve her mistress." (III, ii, 206—8.)

Both women leave Belmont together, dressed in men's clothes:

Portia: When we are both accoutred like young men.
(III, iv, 63.)

At the Trial-Scene, both at the same moment, make ironical remarks to their lovers about their wives: IV, i, 286 ff. Both receive back the rings from their husbands: IV, Sc. ii. Both tease their husbands in the last act.

Portia: Even so void is your false heart of truth
By heaven I will ne'er come in your bed
Until I see the ring.

Nerissa: Nor I in yours
Till I again see mine. (V, i, 189—92.)

Similarly the two utter the same sentiments in the two speeches from line 223 to 229 of the fifth act. Further on in the same act, Nerissa imitates her mistress:

Portia: pardon me, Bassanio.

Nerissa: And pardon me, my gentle Gratiano
(V. i, 250—51).

The best way of understanding the purpose of Shakespere in drawing Nerissa is to compare her with Lucetta in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Miss Latham has made an excellent study of each character and pointed out the main differences between them⁶⁶. She made no attempt, however, to observe the dramatic value of the figures with relation to the particular play in which each occur.

Lucetta is not a woman of high breeding because her manner wants openness⁶⁷. Julia, her mistress, does not act like a lady who has been accustomed to have friendly service of a waiting woman. Her capricious nature forces Lucetta to keep at a distance and to resort to indirect means of action. In the scene where the lovers are reviewed, the maid speaks apologetically, showing that she is studying the reactions of her mistress and is afraid of offending her:

"Ay, madam, so you stumble not unheedfully."
(I, ii, 3.)

"Please you repeat their names, I'll show my mind
According to my shallow simple skill."
(I, ii, 7—8.)

Julia's reference to Proteus brings a comment from Lucetta which stirs up a resentful feeling.

Julia: How now! what means this passion at his name?

Luc. Pardon, dear madam: 'tis a passion shame

That I, unworthy body as I am,
Should censure thus on lovely gentlemen.
(I, ii, 17—19.)

She cringingly advises her mistress to love Proteus:

"Ay, if you thought your love not cast away."
(I, ii, 26.)

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 92.

When Lucetta wishes to deliver a love message to Julia, she resorts to deception. She speaks guardedly when cross-questioned, her first thought being to disclaim personal interest:

Julia: And is that paper nothing?

Luc. Nothing concerning me.

(I, ii, 74—5.)

The weakness of Lucetta in the face of the impulsive Julia, places her on the plane of a common waiting-maid. She decidedly disapproves Julia's romantic notion of going off in male attire, but weakly submits when she senses her determination.

The difference between Nerissa and Lucetta depends on the treatment of Julia and that of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. Each waiting-lady is fitted into the story to help the elucidation of her mistress. In Julia there is no real nobility or womanly dignity, while in Portia, as I have emphasized in my study of her, this very quality is enhanced by every possible dramatic means. Hence Nerissa is put on a higher level of social life than Lucetta and the relations between the two women are always harmonious. Nothing is allowed to slip into the dialogue between these two that would detract the least bit from Portia's gracious and noble character. It is impossible to conceive in the mouth of Nerissa the following sarcastic and cowardly remarks made by Lucetta:

"To plead for love deserves more fee than hate.

(I, ii, 48.)

"Nay now you are too flat,

And mar the concord with too harsh a descent."

(I, ii, 93—94.)

"She makes it strange; but she would be best pleased
To be angered with another letter." (II, ii, 102—3.)

"Nay, I was taken up for laying them down:

Yet here they shall not lie, for catching cold."

(I, ii, 134—135.)

"I see things too, although you judge I wink."

(I, ii, 138.)

Portia is an ideally lovely woman. She is noble in worldly wealth, in mind, and in spirit. The figure of Nerissa is built up from the point of view of Portia's nobility of character. The impression made on the audience by the waiting lady must not mar the main impression of Portia. Hence the friendship between the two ladies is real and as Miss Latham remarks, while Julia must oppress those around her to hold her position, "Portia rules by virtue of her strength of mind⁶⁸. Lucetta being the more common type of maid is saucy. She is more human than Nerissa, considering her position in life. Nerissa, on the other hand, is artificially lifted from her low station and is made to represent a different type of waiting-lady. Nerissa's type, as I have said above, was familiar to the audience of the sixteenth century and it was not surprising to them that she is open and frank in her conversation with Portia. Nerissa freely speculates on Bassanio's worth as a lover:

"True, madam; he of all the men that ever
my foolish eyes looked upon, was the best
deserving a fair lady. (I, ii, 109—11.)

Portia answers her in an open confidential spirit:

"I remember him well; and remember him worthy of praise."
(I, ii, 112.)

Nerissa salutes Bassanio:

"Bassanio, lord love, if thy will it be!" (II, ix, 100.)

Nerissa has not the slightest influence on the action of the main plot, except through her support of Portia's character which is noble-hearted and generous. Nerissa is just another instrument in the dramatist's hands for bringing out Portia's gracious person. This is effected by raising Nerissa above the type of maid illustrated by Lucetta, so that, in an atmosphere of social harmony, she parallels the actions of Portia.

LOW COMEDY SCENES.

Critics have said much concerning the relation of Launcelot to the rest of the play. His part in some places shows a close

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 95.

connection with the vital events of the main plots. This is evident in the transference of his services from the Jew to Bassanio, and his activity as connecting link between Jessica and her lover. Launcelot also plays a part as messenger between Bassanio and Shylock in arranging for the dinner. Elze, after discussing the goodness of Launcelot—brought about in his relations with his father, observes that this happy relation between father and son is just the reverse of the strained feeling between Jessica and Shylock. The scene which shows us Launcelot and Gobbo on the stage together is, says Elze, a scene which brings "the two Gobbos into a close connection with the whole—a scene in which the public generally inclined to consider a superfluous by-play."⁶⁹ There is also a tendency to read into the activities of these humorous characters, thoughts which are purely the result of personal impression and a desire on the part of the critic to read into the play things which were never meant by the dramatist. "Old Gobbo", says Elze, "probably knew very well why he brought a dish of doves to master Jew, some of which he might hope would fall to the share of his son."

It cannot for a moment be accepted as true that such a skilfully worked out comic scene as that between the Gobbos is a mere "by-play"; nor do we believe that such a subjective meaning can be derived from Gobbo's dish of doves. The tradition of the Elizabethan stage easily explains the presence of comic material in dramas of every sort, and the local custom in Venice explains why Gobbo had a dish of doves⁷⁰. Clarke, likewise, reads characterization into the comic scene where Launcelot discusses Christianity with Jessica⁷¹. Her trifling with the clown shows her to be a callous creature. This is absurd.

There is no doubt that Launcelot belongs to the same class as Launce, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. He (Launcelot) is called a clown in the old editions. He plays the part of a

⁶⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁷⁰ Verity remarks in a note that doves were "a natural present in Italy." (*Op. cit.*, p. 117).

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 406.

popular figure on the sixteenth century stage, that of a jester and a arrant knave. Clarke characterizes him as "a sort of 'arabesque' character in the order of humanity"⁷². "He has a light heart", says Clarke, "talks glibly, if half meaningless, which reminds us of Gratiano"⁷³. Douce does not think he is a fool because a person like Shylock would not have a fool for a servant⁷⁴. Yet he is called "a patch", "a fool of Hagar's offspring" and in one place "the fool". Lorenzo exasperated by Launcelot's muddling talk, cries out:

"O dear discretion, how his words are suited!

The fool hath planted in his memory

An army of good words. (III, v, 40—43.)

Douce does not think that these terms are "designed as synonymous with the appellation of clown, as in *Love's Labor's Lost*; on the whole we have here a proof that Shakspeare has not observed that nice discrimination of character in his clown for which some have given him credit"⁷⁵.

Ulrici speaks of Launcelot as a necessary figure in the play and in his usual way sees some connection between him and the leading idea of the play. "He is not merely in his place, but we could not do without him. As in all other comedies of Shakspeare, we have in him a comic representative of the leading idea. He exhibits it in travestie; it is concentrated in his living personality, and in all his individual deeds and pursuits, and therein rendered directly and vividly perceptible. Compare, for instance, amusing humor and parody where he balances the right and wrong of running away from the Jew (Act II, Sc. 2). In truth, we have not time to dilate upon his importance in the piece, or the amiableness of his personal character. This, however, we must say, that Shakspeare has employed him wherever possible, in order to bring out his fundamental idea"⁷⁶. But the part played by Launcelot can, we think, be explained better on historical grounds than by regarding it as a support to Ulrici's "central idea".

⁷² *Op. cit.*, p. 410.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 411.

⁷⁴ Furnus, *Variorum*, p. 62.

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁷⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 308.

The purpose of Launcelot in *The Merchant of Venice* is not any different from that of similar figures in Shakspere's earlier plays. He may be handled with much greater care than the Dromios in *The Comedy of Errors*. He is probably more humanly drawn than Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* but his main purpose of serving up to the audience the humorous material that they wanted, still guided the dramatist. The vices of the mediæval stage were given a great deal of liberty in their speeches. Their function was to speak and act in a manner pleasing to the audience. In the early days of Shakspere, it still remained necessary to put into the mouths of jesters "the kind of joke the spectator expected from them"⁷⁷. The improvement in the figure of Launcelot over those of his kind who preceded him is due to a more human touch, and to a closer connection to the main plot of the story, but his presence in the play is wholly due to the demand of the audience for comic relief, the same reason which guided the morality writers in the handling of vice.

Whenever Launcelot appears on the stage we expect to see some sort of crude joke pulled off. The manner of joking is not unlike that carried on by the vice in the morality plays. There are always two in the morality plays who work out the comic incidents: the butt and the one who cracks the joke. The same method is used in the scenes where Launcelot appears and this jesting is usually independent of the action of the main story. The principal comic scene in *The Merchant of Venice* is the second scene of the second act where Launcelot makes a series of practical jokes at the expense of his near-sighted father. This low comedy scene is introduced by a long speech by Launcelot who debates with himself about leaving the Jew's service. Such speeches wherein a person's conscience and the fiend oppose one another show Shakspere's industry in collecting material for his patchwork scenes⁷⁸. Douce points out that this curious struggle might have been suggested by 'the monkish tale, "wherein a woman's laziness argues with her conscience about getting up in

⁷⁷ Brander Matthews, *Shakspere as a Playwright*, p. 77.

⁷⁸ Furness, *Variorum*, p. 64, note.

the morning to go to mass⁷⁹". The main thing for us to notice about the speech is that it is wholly illogical, so that we are to understand from the very first appearance of Launcelot that what he says in the rest of the play is to be taken merely at its face value.

When his father comes on the stage, Launcelot immediately makes him the butt of a series of harmless jokes. He takes pleasure in giving him illogical directions to the Jew's house; he deceives him with regard to his identity; insists by his own false logic on being called master; kneels down with his back to his father so that his long hair is mistaken for a beard; and lastly acts in a nonsensical way when the old man is trying to make suit to Bassanio. The whole scene is mingled with another comic-making device which pleased the Elizabethan audience, that of using words in the wrong place. He says: "I will try confusions with him", (II, ii, 32) where he means "conclusions". Similarly he misuses "infection", "frutifie", and Gobbo uses "defect" humorously. Lorenzo explains this fault in Launcelot's vocabulary, "How his words are suited", meaning his words are badly suited. (III, v, 41.) Launcelot likes words and brings up subjects to give occasion for their use. A few Latin words are used. He displays a knowledge of palmistry and tries to criticise mythological expressions. This jumbling of words is done according to the taste of the sixteenth century audience. It was no doubt part of the general fondness at that time for "inkhorn terms"⁸⁰.

In the next scene, Jessica and Launcelot converse intimately. The latter's part, except to act as listener to the Jewess' complaint against her father, is simply to crack one good joke. Jessica is the person at whom this ridicule is directed. "Most beautiful pagan, most sweet Jew! if a Christian do not play the knave and get thee, I am much deceived." (II, iii, 10—12.)

In the fourth scene of the second act, Launcelot performs

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Gummere comments in his notes; „This a time when new words, 'inkhorn terms' were flooding the English language, and rousing people to lively interest in the matter of vocabulary." (*The Merchant of Venice*, p. 115).

the services of a messenger, conveying a letter to Lorenzo from Jessica, and going off to bid the Jew to Bassanio's dinner.

In the fifth scene we find him back at his regular business of joking at somebody else's expense. Shylock is made the butt of all his actions in this scene. The first one seems crude to us but probably worked well on Shakspere's audience:

Launcelot: Why Jessica!

Shylock: Who bids thee call? I do not bid thee call.

Launcelot: Your worship was wont to tell me I could do nothing without bidding.

Following this joke, Shylock is gotten the best of again by Launcelot's funny business of conveying a secret message through the use of poetry:

There will come a Christian by,

Will be worth a Jewess' eye. (II, v, 42—3.)

In this scene we also find one instance of the other method of joking. Shylock is again made the butt; in the ironical remark: "My young master doth expect your reproach." Shylock, taking "reproach" in its literal meaning knocks back: "So do I his." When Launcelot, too, speaks of certain ones conspiring together and mentions metaphorically about Black-Monday and Ash-Wednesday, the Jew is evidently the butt because he is kept in the dark about the true import of these words.

In the fifth scene of the third act, which is a pause scene, the dramatist makes use of more farcical matter. Launcelot talks glibly on the troubles of Christianity and makes Jessica the butt of a huge joke when he answers her plea that she is a Christian through marriage with Lorenzo:

"Truly the more to blame he; we were Christians enow before; e'en as many as could well live, one by another. This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs; if we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money. (III, v, 8—12.)

Elze tried to read serious meaning into this dialogue between Jessica and Launcelot. He thinks that it expresses Shakspere's

notion about the conversion of Jews, and that the dramatist is disapproving in advance the punishment given Shylock at the end of the play⁸¹. The slandering of religion was the commonest theme for jesting in the old Morality play and Interludes, and the audience still enjoyed and desired the same type of amusement in Shakspeare's day. The very triviality of the scene proves its purpose.

The witty conversation between Launcelot and Lorenzo has nothing to do with the plot of the story and its value depends only on its own pleasantry. Launcelot's persistent punning with Lorenzo was no doubt more amusing to an audience in Shakspeare's day than to us. Lorenzo this time is the butt of Launcelot's joking.

The last we see of Launcelot is in the first scene of the fifth act where he is made to deliver a message to Lorenzo in as humorous a way as possible. Even here, more through his actions than his words, he makes Lorenzo the butt by his amusing indifference to his presence. Launcelot calls for Lorenzo.

Lorenzo: Leave hollaing, man, here.

Launcelot: Sola! where? where?

Lorenzo: Here.

Launcelot: Tell him there's a post come from my master with his horn full of good news; my master will be here ere morning.

Launcelot is best described as a joker as his purpose is simply to do and say everything in a funny manner. His jokes are of a very elementary nature and there is nothing in his part to compare to the intellectual wit of Shakspeare's later jesters or fools. Nor can he be classed with the later clowns like Touchstone in *As You Like It* or Feste in *Twelfth Night*, both of whom have a greater amount of intellectual wit than Launcelot. Launcelot is simply a stage joker his purpose being to crack a joke at some one else's expense and to misuse "hard" words.

⁸¹ *Op. cit.* p. 110.

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Hesperia

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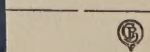
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